The AIR PILOT

RANDALL PARRISH

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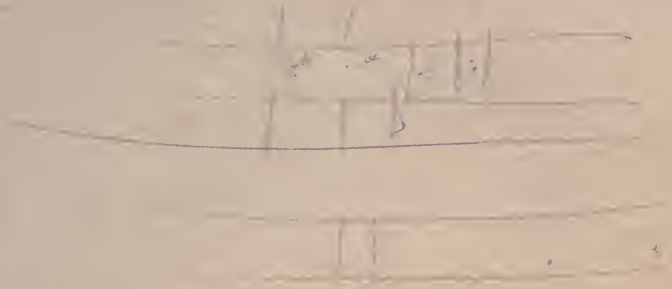

THE AIR PILOT

Winging silent passage through the sky

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THE AIR PILOT

A Modern Love Story

BY

RANDALL PARRISH

AUTHOR OF "KEITH OF THE BORDER," "WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING," " MY LADY OF DOUBT," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD

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THE AIR PILOT

CHAPTER I

A MONOPLANE MYSTERY

THERE were several of us, chance acquaintances of travel, idling away an hour in the smoking room of the *Cedric,* when the conversation drifted to the late aviation meet at Chicago. I think it was a Minneapolis lumber man who originally introduced the subject, telling by chance some incident of the meet, but it was Hadley, an enthusiast in such matters, and member of the New York Aero Club, who interjected a remark which led to the telling of this strange tale of modern adventure and love.

"Yes, I was there," he said, the blue rings from his cigar circling above his head, "and remained through the meet. But the one thing I went for failed to take place. Did any of you fellows

ever chance to hear of the Dessaud monoplane? I presume not, unless you are students of the game."

A little man with a white, wrinkled face, leaned forward across the table.

"I read about it in a newspaper," he said sharply. "Some new discovery in balancing, and a silent engine. Was that it?"

"Partially—yes," acknowledged Hadley slowly. "The improvements as outlined were almost enough to revolutionize flying. In addition, there was report of a newly discovered paint which rendered an aeroplane practically invisible two hundred feet away. Dessaud is a daring fellow—a French army officer, and well known also in England, where some of his earlier mechanical inventions have been adopted. I first heard of him in Paris two years ago, and he was spoken of then as the coming genius of French aviation. Naturally therefore I became intensely interested when I heard of this newly devised monoplane bearing his name, and said to be capable of flying without noise, while bearing necessary supplies for a protracted journey. It was the statement that he was to be there with his new

military machine to demonstrate its merits, which took me to Chicago."

"And the man failed to appear?"

"That was the odd part of it. Dessaud was certainly in the city—registered at the Congress. I saw the name myself—'Philip Dessaud, Paris.' As I remember now his suite was 'I 54.' But he was not to be found; indeed the only evidence that he had ever been there was that signature on the clerk's book, and two suit cases left unopened in the room. No one about the hotel had any remembrance of ever even seeing the man with the exception of the bell-boy who had taken him up."

"Probably a fake."

"No," firmly. "That explanation does n't exactly fit. Remember his monoplane was not a speculation; it had already been tried out in France, on the military aviation fields. It really belonged to the French government. He was in America on leave of absence to demonstrate its military value. He brought the machine with him; or rather it preceded him a week, under care of competent mechanics, and was already set up ready for flight."

"You actually saw the monoplane then?"

"I saw the hangar where it had been set up," Hadley admitted, "but the machine was not there, nor any of the men connected with the enterprise. It had been, however," he added hastily. "It seems that Dessaud, afraid that others might appropriate his idea—at least this is my supposition—had arranged, through the assistance of the French consul, for the use of a large vacant lot out on Sixty-third Street, near the lake, instead of joining with the other aviators at Grant Park. Here a hangar had been built, and the machine installed. Two expert mechanics (French soldiers) and a day and a night watchman (Pinkerton men) were in charge. The neighbors saw nothing of Dessaud, nor was the machine, after being set up, taken out of the hangar at any time to their knowledge. It was there, however, seen by a half hundred people, properly set up, and apparently made ready for flight. Then a peculiar thing happened. The morning after Dessaud had registered at the Congress Hotel, when the regular day guard reported for duty, he found no one to relieve, the doors of the hangar standing wide open, and the machine gone. The two

mechanics never reappeared, nor did the Pinkerton night watchman ever report back to his office. From that hour, so far as I could learn, and I felt sufficient curiosity to investigate carefully, no one ever saw a sign of the missing monoplane. That is the story, gentlemen."

"What did the police—the Pinkerton people do?" questioned the white-faced man crisply.

"Nothing. From all appearances the affair was hushed up. The Superintendent of the Pinkerton Agency, when I called at his office, merely stated that they were not even consulted, and the only newspaper item bearing on the affair, which came to my notice, was a paragraph in an afternoon sheet stating that the Dessaud monoplane would take no part in the aviation meet, on account of some defect discovered at the last moment."

"And the French consul?"

"Smiled and shrugged his shoulders, saying very politely that he did not care to interfere with the private affairs of Monsieur the Lieutenant Dessaud; that his government was not at all involved, and hence he could give me no information whatever. I did learn, however, from

other sources, that this same noncommittal gentleman paid the bill at the hotel promptly, recovered the unlocked suit cases, and furnished transportation for a mechanic from Chicago to Paris. Beyond this slight knowledge the whole episode remains a blank."

No one of us spoke for several moments. Then the man sitting opposite me, who had been smoking steadily while Hadley spoke, apparently only politely interested in the topic under discussion, straightened in his upholstered chair, and drew a card case from his pocket. The slight movement attracted my attention, while the change of posture revealed his features under the glare of light. He might have been thirty years of age, smoothly shaven, with pleasant gray eyes, and light hair, medium figure, and rather carefully dressed. What impressed me most, however, was the firmness of the mouth and chin, and a certain outward expression of good breeding which can never be successfully counterfeited. I instinctively felt the impress of character. As I glanced across at him, attracted by his first movement, he quietly drew a card from the case, and extended it to Hadley across the table.

"It may be of interest to you, Monsieur," he said rather slowly, yet in most excellent English, "to learn that you have been discussing an affair of some importance to me."

Hadley's face flamed, his eyes riveted on the card.

"I sincerely beg your pardon," he stammered. "I was not aware—"

"It is not necessary, the apology," the other interrupted quickly. "Your curiosity was but most natural. You are an aviator, as I understand?"

"Merely as an amateur."

"That is true of us all—we learn; we are students. That you feel the interest, possess the faith, is enough. I am glad to know that my name is not unknown to you as a student. You felt my interest in my work—why should I ask more?" His eyes, still smiling, swept over our faces. "One among you said 'fake,' a word I like little. Perhaps you would listen while I tell what occurred in Chicago. 'T is rather an odd tale, Messieurs, but it is not a 'fake.' Yet I have only my word to give."

"The monoplane?" I asked.

He bowed across the table.

"Lies a shapeless wreck in the north woods, Monsieur," he replied easily, "but with duty done. You wish the story?"

He must have read the answer in our faces, for, with a smile, he relit his cigar, and settled back more comfortably in his chair.

CHAPTER II

THE VOICE IN THE TELEPHONE

I WILL speak with slowness, Messieurs, for while I know the English well, yet it is in French I think more easily, and at times find it difficult to discover an equivalent for some native phrase. This you will pardon, for the incidents I am about to relate are most vivid to my memory. To forget would be impossible.

I am Philip Dessaud, an officer of Chausseurs, but for five years past detailed by the military authorities to experiments in aviation. These have been conducted largely at Nice, yet my work has compelled me to visit both Italy and England. Were it not for my established reputation in these three great countries I might hesitate to relate the strange adventure which has befallen me here on my first visit to America. Yet the word of Philip Dessaud is surely sufficient. In France I speak with authority in aeronautics, and even in America my achievements are to some

extent known. Very well; I can address you then in all frankness as a gentleman of established veracity.

A year and a half ago I first placed in operation the machine since known as the Dessaud Monoplane. While entirely of my own invention, yet its method of operation is a guarded secret of the government. The details I cannot reveal. All I am at liberty to say, is that it requires but a single operator, can rise within a space of one hundred feet, and possesses sufficient lifting power to transport a rapid fire gun and ample ammunition. I mention this as it was originally designed for war purposes. The engine is small, exceedingly light in weight, but of remarkable power, and practically silent in operation. During experimental trials in France I have twice made cross-country flights approximating one hundred miles, the last time carrying with me two passengers. This is of official record. You know of the truth, Monsieur?

Hadley, of whom the question was directly asked, nodded in affirmation, but no one interrupted.

I would have you realize all this, the narrator

continued, or otherwise you might doubt the truth of what I am about to tell you. I had no thought of visiting America, and only did so under direct orders of the French War Office, in response to a special request from the Consul at Chicago. The latter made all arrangements, rented suitable property, where privacy could be assured, and had a hangar constructed in readiness for our arrival. The machine was shipped from Paris, via the French Line, in charge of two expert mechanics, detailed from the army. These were thoroughly reliable men, who could be implicitly trusted to guard the secrets intrusted to them. In addition the consul was to furnish American watchmen to patrol the grounds both night and day. You see, Messieurs, while France was ready to demonstrate what she had accomplished, yet she would guard her discoveries with care. These were my orders.

It was in the afternoon I reached Chicago, and drove first, in what you call a taxi, to where the monoplane was. The consul was with me, and for an hour I examined everything, testing the work of the mechanics, and satisfying myself the machine was in perfect condition, and well pro-

tected. All was to my liking; at any time, within five minutes, I could be in the air, confident against failure. With enthusiasm I shook hands with both De Vigne and Ramon, my assistants, and departed for the hotel to which I had been directed. Success was apparently already assured; I had no doubt, no question. It was in this confident spirit of victory I parted with the Consul, hoping to rest a few hours after my long journey. *Sacre!* 'T is a strange world!

My suite was high up, overlooking the great lake, and I lit a cigarette, and sat by the window alone looking out. At first it was the stretch of water, glinting in the sun which held my attention, and the boats visible against the horizon; then I noted the aviation camp amid the green of the park below, and became absorbed in its contemplation. It was to me a fascination, and I dreamed of what the week would reveal to these American aviators. That I should fail was not possible; confidence in myself, and in my machine was supreme. I smiled in happiness at what was before me.

It was then my telephone rang. Startled by a sudden fear lest something had gone wrong at

the hangar, I crossed the room, and grasped the receiver.

"Hello," I said, in the American fashion.

It was unmistakably a woman's voice that answered, a peculiarly soft musical voice. Even in my first surprise I was aware of its fascination.

"Is this you, Philip?"

"That—that chances to be my name—yes," I responded hesitatingly. "Yet, surely you are mistaken."

"I think not," and it seemed to me I could detect an accent of pride in the swiftly spoken words. "This is certainly Suit I 54?"

"I believe so—yes: but really—"

She interrupted me with a short laugh.

"Oh, hush, I beg. Of course I understand you have no desire to advertise your presence abroad, yet that is no reason why you should deny your identity to me. Besides, I must see and talk with you at once."

"But truly," I protested earnestly, "I do not know with whom I am speaking."

"Really. This is most droll. You do not recognize my voice?"

"I regret not," I admitted gallantly. "It is

most musical; not to be easily forgotten, yet awakens no memory."

She laughed again.

"Then the very mystery should appeal to you. But really I hardly believe you so ignorant. Are there so many ladies calling you up that you cannot tell one from another?"

"There are none—not one; it is that which makes me believe this all a mistake."

"And I am convinced otherwise. It is the room, and the name. You will know me when we meet, so let us not waste time. You will see me, surely?"

There was just enough anxiety in the tone to stimulate my interest.

"It is of importance?"

"To me—yes. I must talk with you at once, alone. There are reasons why we should not be seen together, and I cannot explain over a telephone."

"The parlor," I suggested.

"Oh, no, no," hastily. "That would be far too public. I am talking to you now from a public booth, and it is not safe for us to be seen together —at least about the hotel."

"I cannot comprehend—"

"Which convinces me that you really do not recognize my voice," she hastily interrupted. "If I should tell you, you would understand in an instant. But I dare not venture; no one knows in America who may be on the line. Please be gallant enough to grant my request. Surely you cannot be afraid of a woman?"

"It is not fear," I protested indignantly. "If Mademoiselle truly knows me then she must be aware that I have never lacked daring. Yet this is strange, mysterious, and I know not the meaning. Can you not give me some clue?"

"I prefer not," and I thought there was laughter in the voice. "Your surprise will be greater when we meet, and I would be where I can see the expression on your face. You will make the appointment?"

"Where, and when?"

"In front of the Art Building, as soon as it is dusk."

"I do not know the place."

"Easily enough found—the doorman will tell you; not five minutes walk up Michigan Avenue."

"But," I protested, "how will I know? how will I recognize you as the lady?"

"By my face, of course," and this time she laughed outright. "Have I not told you we are old acquaintances? How dare you doubt my word. But wait; to remove even this fear I will promise to dress in gray, and wear a bunch of violets at my belt. Is not this enough to establish my identity?"

"Yes—but—"

"Oh, enough of that," impatiently. "This hesitating is not at all natural. If I did not know there could be no mistake I would almost believe I was talking to a stranger. Surely you never before refused the request of a lady; do not begin now. You will be there?"

"Yes," I acknowledged.

"Such a man. The answer is half-hearted. However I accept even that, but only to make you regret, and teach you a lesson in gallantry. Adieu then, until dusk at the Art Building. You will not fail?"

"You have my word."

"Which I accept; meanwhile I will busy myself in thinking up some fit punishment for your

forgetfulness of an old friend. I would make the punishment fit the crime."

The words ended in a musical laugh, and, after listening a moment longer, I hung up the receiver, and lit a cigarette. As I stood there alone gazing about the silent apartment the oddness of the occurrence obsessed me. Somehow while the woman's voice—vibrant, young—responded to mine it all seemed natural enough; but now that it had ceased to fascinate with its vague suggestion of good humor, suspicion swept over me. Who could she be? For what purpose could she have called me on the wire? Walking the floor I racked my brain vainly for any recollection of a voice such as hers among all my list of acquaintances. It was of the kind once heard never to be forgotten—soft, vibrant, musical, tingling ever with suppressed merriment—a peculiar voice, full of character. In my imagination I could almost dream the woman who could possess such a voice. I, to whom expression was always a revelation, could never have heard this woman speak, and fail to remember.

Yet if she was a stranger why should she be seeking me? Why conceal her identity? My

suspicion was aroused, and I could not but recall the warning given me by my government before I sailed. Yet the very memory of her laughter echoing along the wire, the good humor of her badinage, served to overcome all doubt. The sort of woman I pictured her could never be the secret agent of either Germany or England. The very conception was repugnant. Besides what had I to fear? I bore on my person no papers of importance, and I could go to this meeting armed, prepared at any instant to defend myself if others appeared, or treachery manifested itself. Moreover the whole affair smacked oddly of adventure, to me ever an irresistible attraction. I was impelled to see the woman of the voice: to thus learn if she was also the woman of my dreams. It was the choice of a Frenchman, and a soldier.

I scarcely know how the hours passed, only that I rested, reading a little, and reflecting much. A light lunch was served me in my rooms by a pleasant-faced German waiter, with whom I conversed in his native tongue, and so soon as darkness began to obscure the lake, I descended in the elevator, more eager than ever to learn

what was destined to befall me at the rendezvous. As the moment approached my heart beat fast in anticipation, yet it was with coolness I had prepared for any emergency, and stepped forth upon the street pavement with every nerve braced, and alert. Whether this was to be love or war I was ready.

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS

IT was like some Parisian boulevard, that Michigan Avenue, with the park on the one side, and great buildings blazing with lights upon the other, while between, glistening in the glow of electric clusters, an endless stream of motor cars glided noiselessly along the smooth pavement. The wide walk was thronged with pedestrians, interested in the aviation camp, or strolling idly through the summer night, the women richly dressed, the men in somber colors. It was a scene of enchantment, ever changing, yet continually brilliant in the glow of multi-colored lights.

The doorman gave me directions, and I drifted into the throng moving northward, so entertained by my neighbors as to almost forget for the moment the nature of my quest. Yet it was but a short walk, not over three blocks I presume, when I found myself opposite what must be the Art

Building, a notable edifice of stone standing alone in the open. Assured of this by questioning a passer-by, I picked my way across through speeding vehicles, and approached the steps, my mind again centered on this special adventure. There were several women near by, some with escorts, but a few unattended in the strange freedom accorded the sex in this country.

Unable to distinguish between these I sauntered the full length of the building, and, still in doubt, returned toward the entrance, without having ventured to address anyone. Two or three of the women were apparently waiting the appearance of some expected companion, and glanced at me curiously, yet none of these met my ideal of her who had spoken to me through the medium of the 'phone. Nor did they wear the violets of recognition.

In the shadow of the further lion, however, one stood motionless, barely discernible. I must have passed her by unseeing on my first trip, but as I returned more slowly, my eyes searching the gloom dimly perceived the outlines of her figure. Perhaps I might have passed her by the second time, but for her own impatience. Indeed I was

already at the foot of the steps, tempted to abandon the search, half convinced I was the victim of a hoax, when she took a step forward into the light. The sudden movement attracted my attention, and the first hurried glance revealed the violets at her belt. Beyond this I saw nothing clearly, only to realize that the face below the wide brim of the hat was young, and the lady petite. Her eyes were not upon me, yet there could be no mistake, and I lifted my hat, and bowed. She stood still in evident surprise, her eyes swiftly searching my face.

"You mistake—" she began, but I interrupted:

"Pardon me if that be true, yet I think not. You wear the violets, Mademoiselle, which were to be the sign of my recognition," and I pointed at her belt. "Indeed I am sure now that you have spoken, for there cannot be two such voices in the world."

"But—but you are not Philip Houser. It was not you to whom I spoke."

I began to see light, to understand.

"It was a mistake then; I thought as much," I said regretfully. "Yet, Mademoiselle, what could I do? You called me Philip, which is also

my name—Philip Dessaud," and again I bowed with all respect. "It was you who insisted."

"Yes, I know," she attempted to explain, her voice trembling, her gloved hands clasped. "I —I was so sure. And you were in I 54, were you not?"

"Certainly; that is my suite."

"Since when?"

"It must be from three o'clock this afternoon, Mademoiselle."

Her eyes fell, then glanced up again into my face.

"It is indeed a mistake—such a curious one," she began. "You must listen, and believe me. I do not in the least blame you; as a gentleman you could do no less, for you could not know but what the message was from some friend. It is all my own fault, my own carelessness. He was there—Philip Houser—in Suite I 54 this morning. I read the name on the register. I—I went there seeking him, but lacked the courage at that time to speak. I cannot explain this now, nor will you ask. You are a gentleman, I am sure, or I could not speak even as freely as I do. You respect my silence?"

"Most assuredly; you need only tell me to go, Mademoiselle."

"No; that is not my meaning. I wish to explain, to make clear the nature of my mistake; only there are conditions I cannot confide to a stranger. I—I am not specially a friend of Philip Houser, merely an acquaintance, a business acquaintance. We have not met for two years, yet there was a reason why I should see him now, a reason of importance. Yet I was uncertain how my appeal would be met, and hesitated. It was not until late this afternoon that I finally gained courage, and going into a public booth called his room at the hotel."

"You called him Philip."

"He is of an age to permit that; besides we were at school together."

"Yet the voice which answered was a strange one."

"Some voices are never natural over the wire, and his was changing when I last heard it. Besides I was so sure suspicion never once entered my mind."

"That might be possible."

"Might be," the tone expressive of indigna-

tion, her eyes flashing into mine. "Do these words imply doubt? If so there remains nothing more for me to relate."

"By no means; you misunderstand. I believe all you say, and merely questioned to better clear the affair up in my own mind. Odd as this meeting has been, we can be friends, can we not?" Impelled by some sudden impulse I held out my hand.

Her face was toward the light, and I could perceive the change of expression. There was an instant of hesitancy; then her gloved hand met mine firmly.

"I would be a prude not to say yes," she responded frankly. "Although I cannot let you dream that I ever contemplated such a thing. This is all an accident—a most unfortunate accident so far as it concerns me—yet I can congratulate myself that it is no worse. I have confidence that you are a gentleman."

I bowed, still retaining the small hand, and conscious of the almost wistful look as her eyes met mine.

"I am Philip Dessaud," I said simply, "an officer of the French army."

She drew a quick breath, apparently of surprise.

"Why, I have heard the name before; you—you are the aviator?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle," with a smile, "and it is surely something not to be entirely unknown."

"If all I have read be true it is much more than that," she responded quickly. "They say—the newspaper writers—that your discoveries will revolutionize flying. Of course," she added hastily, "as a woman I know about such things only in the most superficial way."

"And the suppositions of the newpaper men have yet to be proven by experiment," I confessed good humoredly. "The end of the week will tell the tale."

"And I shall be so interested now in your success—just from this little meeting, this brief acquaintance. What small happenings change our outlook on life."

"Do you call this small, Mademoiselle? I have begun to view it as of importance. Perhaps it is because you see it with other eyes—beautiful as I imagine them to be—that you still refrain from telling me whom I am addressing?"

She withdrew her hand, but with a gentleness that left no sting, stepping back a little, so as to come within the shade of the stone.

"You possess the French gift of compliment, Monsieur," and her voice had in it the old accent of laughter. "I am not sure it meets my approval. However, I shall be fair with you—I am Helen Probyn."

"Not of the English Probyns, in Kent? I have been at their manor-house."

"No such luck; while I may be a sixteenth cousin, who knows, the very best I can claim is an ancestral home on the coast of Maine. No, Monsieur, I abominate pretense, and if you accept me at all it will have to be as a very common individual—'unknown, unhonored, and unsung.' "

"Which statement I believe, or not, as I please."

"No," decisively. "You must accept my word. I am simply an atom in the great sea of life—a working girl."

"A working girl," I mocked. "Your language, your dress betrays you."

"You think so. That is because you judge

from the viewpoint of the European rather than the American. Nevertheless it is true, Monsieur, for, although my work may be of the brain instead of the body, I am still under orders. If my task is not done I suffer, and am told to go and come, fetch and carry, just as though I was a serf in the fields. In other words I am an employee, dependent on the whim of my employer for my daily bread. This fact changes the whole aspect of affairs, does it not?"

"You mean my interest in you?"

"Certainly. That is why I have been so frank. I know your class prejudice, your point of view. Over there a great gulf is fixed between those who earn, and those with nothing better to do than spend. Even in America it exists to some extent, but with you it is an inheritance of birth. Thinking me of your own class you became interested in my personality; but now that I have confessed the truth all your desire will be to politely say good night. I prefer to anticipate," and she extended her hand. "Good night, Monsieur."

I held it close, my heart beating more rapidly.

"You think me a snob?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur; merely what birth and environment would naturally make you."

"But cannot a man, a cosmopolitan, overcome such prejudices?" I protested warmly. "Even if I admit being born into the class of idlers, yet my life since has thrown me much into the society of those who work. I have even learned to work myself beside them, and have turned toward them for instruction. I have mechanics with me here —common soldiers from the ranks—who are my friends."

"Not socially, Monsieur. That is the point I make."

"A distinction in your case I refuse to admit, Mademoiselle. I bow to your will—yes. If it is to be good-by, I submit, but never because I deem you not of my class, or beneath me in any way. You do insist?"

"It will be best. I am sorry, but I am sure it will be best."

Our eyes met, yet she stepped aside, and passed me. It was accomplished with such quiet decision that I failed for the instant to grasp the truth. But one fact impressed itself upon me—those eyes which had been lifted to mine were misty

with tears. She was in trouble, in distress, and yet she was leaving me. In that second of time all suspicion, all doubt left my mind, and I became conscious of a new respect for this girl, a new desire to serve her. Whoever she was, however strange our meeting, I could not let her pass out of my life like this. In obedience to the first swift impulse, I crossed the broad walk, and touched her arm.

"You shall not disappear like that," I exclaimed. "I am enough of a fatalist to accept destiny. You will tell me all."

"All?"

"Yes, there were tears in your eyes as you turned away. You had held them back as long as it was possible. It was only because you could restrain yourself no longer that you left so hastily."

"Oh, please—"

"No. I am going to say what I think. You are in trouble, some real, desperate trouble. That was why you ventured to call upon this old-time acquaintance, Houser. Blindly seeking help, you had found his name on the hotel register, but at first lacked courage to approach him. When

you finally did call up by telephone he had left the room, and you got me. Is n't this the truth?"

"I—I—why do you insist upon my answering? You have no right to question me in this way."

"Not if it was idle curiosity; but I wish to assure you my motive is far higher than that. Forget how we have met—it was no fault of either of us—and believe me a gentleman. To my mind the first duty of gentleness is to relieve a woman in distress. I claim the privilege. Surely you will trust me? You will not refuse?"

She stood with head bowed, her face hidden in the shadows.

"You—you are too kind," she stammered. "I —I do not know what to say."

"Which is a confession itself. My guess then is not far wrong? It was because of trouble—your own trouble—that you sought an interview with Houser?"

"Yes."

"And when you discovered a mistake had been made you were desperate? You did not know what to do?"

"Yes."

"And you left me just now because you could stand the strain no longer? You realize that you must confess everything, or else go away?"

She lifted her eyes to mine.

"That is true—yes."

"Then that is what you are going to do," and I held out my hands.

"What?"

"Trust me as a friend, and make full confession."

She made no movement to give me her hands, but stood motionless with eyes on my face.

"But—but how can I?" she questioned doubtfully. "I—I do not know you."

"Years of acquaintance have little to do with friendship," I insisted. "I wish to serve you honestly, and in all kindness. Surely you will not refuse merely on the plea of our short acquaintance—you are far too sensible a girl."

I felt the warm clasp of her fingers, and knew she was crying softly.

"I would be idiotic if I did," she responded, her voice trembling in spite of every effort at control. "It is not because I am afraid of you; not

because it is unconventional, Monsieur. I have advanced beyond that stage in life. I do what I deem to be right without being troubled by the opinion of others. There were two reasons which have kept me from confiding in you—pride, and a hesitancy to involve a stranger in my trouble."

"Forget the word stranger."

"You compel me to; I will not use it again. Shall I tell you everything?"

"That will be best; then no fresh mistake is possible."

She drew a deep breath, the heavy lashes hiding her eyes.

"I—I am hungry," she confessed, almost in a whisper. "That is the bitter truth, Monsieur; I have not eaten since yesterday."

I stared at her, too surprised for immediate speech.

"You do not believe?"

"Yes, but it is so strange; I can hardly realize the possibility. You must go with me to some restaurant at once," and my eyes searched the electric signs opposite. "The story can wait. Where shall we go?"

She tried to smile, yet trembled so that her

fingers clasped my sleeve. The slight pressure appealed even more strongly than her words.

"That—that is good of you. I cannot talk until I have food; it is the reaction which makes me so weak; the—the knowledge that I have found a friend."

CHAPTER IV

UNCOVERING A CONSPIRACY

I HAVE small recollection of where we went, only it was not far, but involved a ride in an elevator. Not until we were seated opposite each other at a small table did I really have intelligent view of my companion. As I glanced across at her, while ordering from the extensive bill of fare, I was conscious of a newly awakened interest. Not beautiful, perhaps not even pretty, if judged by accepted standards, my vis-a-vis was certainly most attractive, a slender girl of medium height, with dark eyes and hair, the former thoughtful and a bit dreamy; the latter most abundant and glossy. Her face was white, but the skin clear, and, as she turned her head to look at the occupants of the other tables, I could but observe the well-modeled features, expressive of character and high breeding. Whatever she might claim to be—child of the farm, girl of the working class—her appearance, as well as her

language, bespoke ancestry and social standing. I confess this discovery was to me a relief, and I must have exhibited my feeling by some unconscious outward sign, for the lady glanced across at me questioningly.

"What is it, Monsieur?"

"You will laugh if I tell you," I replied uneasily.

"Then tell me, pray, for I want an excuse."

"I have been looking at you for the first time in the light, and approve wholly."

"Indeed," her eyes dancing. "That is nice, but a confession that previously you were somewhat doubtful."

"Why, yes; you see you—"

"Oh, I know," leaning forward, so to speak more softly. "You have been troubled by my humble origin; my confession of having to work for a living. You began to fear you were in contact with one of the lower classes. And now?"

"The thought will never again occur, Mademoiselle. I am convinced, converted. In America it is not as in France, in Europe; or is it that you work from love of art? because the soul aspires?"

She laughed at this heartily, with white teeth gleaming between red lips, and eyes dancing.

"Not so poetical: no! no!" a little gesticulation of the hands, now ungloved, but showing white and ringless. "It is very prosaic, my work, and its main purpose is the purchase of bread and butter. Were you ever in need, Monsieur?"

"Not as you mean—what you call 'broke'; I have been hungry—yes; and thirsty. On campaign one suffers often, and I have also been lost in African forests, and nearly perished. But money! 't is true I have always possessed that."

"Then you know nothing of what it really means to be born poor; to have to struggle from early childhood for every luxury, almost every necessity; to have to earn your own schooling, working while your classmates play, and then, at graduation, accepting the first offer of employment That has been my life, Monsieur, and it is not an uncommon one. It does not seem to me I was ever a little girl, for I can scarcely remember back to a time when I was not burdened by responsibilities." She paused, leaning her head on her hands, but still with eyes on my face. "It is all right to talk of art and ambition, but some

lives must learn early to put such dreams aside, and front the stern realities of existence, thankfully accepting what the gods send."

"You have dreamed, however; it is written in your face."

"Oh, yes! I would not be human else," wearily. "I have dreamed, but the achievement has been nil."

"Hardly that," I insisted, more interested than ever in this personality being so frankly revealed. "A worthy dream is of itself an achievement. What form did yours take?"

"Literature," and her lips smiled. "Is n't it a joke! With all my ambitions the nearest to it I ever really attained was employment on a newspaper."

"And now?"

She spread her hands with expressive gesture.

"I appeal to a stranger for a meal—yet, if history tells truth, poverty is one of the evidences of genius, more especially poetical. Possibly I am about to 'arrive.' "

She spoke so lightly that I failed to appreciate the soberness of appeal underlying her words.

"I am no judge in such matters," was all I could think to reply. "Being an army man my life is too intensely practical for dreams. I simply obey orders, and just now that is also your duty."

"Indeed! with you in command?"

"Temporarily, at least. See, here is our waiter."

"Oh, if it be only to eat, you will find me a most obedient servant. But I insist upon sharing with you—I am quite generous."

"And I accept," adapting myself to her humor. "You will not find me backward, for I only indulged in a light lunch. It is distressing to eat alone."

"And I never find it distressing to eat either alone or in company." She waited in silence until the waiter departed.

"And you are really Philip Dessaud?" she questioned.

"There is no doubt as to that."

"I don't suppose you realize what that fact could mean to me professionally, if I was base enough to turn your friendship into money?"

"Professionally! What do you mean?"

She was eating with relish, yet paused to answer.

"Did I not confess I had been a newspaper woman?"

I nodded, wonderingly.

"And I am still, in a way. In fact this is my only present means of livelihood, and you, Monsieur, embody the one great mystery in town."

"Surely not," yet, even as I protested a faint suspicion came to me.

"What I say is true, however. Every city editor in town has assigned his star men to interview you."

"For what cause?"

"To learn if possible some hint of the new discoveries embodied in your aeroplane, of course."

"But none have called upon me," I said, unbelieving, "so this cannot be true."

She laughed, her eyes suddenly uplifted again to my face.

"And you do not suspect why? Then let me tell you, Monsieur. The French consul left strict orders that you were not to be disturbed. He foresaw all this, and prepared for it. Tomorrow you will find your box crammed full of re-

porters' cards, and notes beseeching interviews. I discovered the situation before you had ever registered."

"You! this is a new revelation."

"And my last," speaking rapidly, and leaning across the table, so her words should not carry beyond me. "Now listen, do you understand why I am going to tell you this?"

"No, although I do not in the least comprehend what 'this' may be."

"Well, it is serious enough, and my reason is that I am a woman, and like you. That is cause enough. But first let me ask you a question—why do you guard the secret of your invention so closely?"

"It is not my secret, Mademoiselle," I replied soberly. "It belongs to France."

"Ah, I see; that explains what I wanted to know, and gives me my excuse for speaking frankly. This then is an international, and not simply a local newspaper affair." She leaned her face on her hands, a little frown making crease between her eyes. "So I am a mere catspaw to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. I began to suspect as much this afternoon. The story will

interest you, Monsieur; you may despise the narrator, but I am disposed to risk that. Shall I go on?"

While I said nothing, my eyes must have answered for me, for, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, she continued slowly:

"I am a special writer on the *Press,* Monsieur, and while it is true I was very hungry when I met you, that hunger arose from deliberate starvation, and not because I lacked means with which to procure food. There was no Philip Houser; that was all a lie told for the purpose of making your acquaintance. Do you despise me for the deceit?"

"Not necessarily," I returned briefly. "To tell the truth, also, I have half suspected this from the first, although I know little of American newspaper methods."

"Then I will tell you. They are bad enough, but this goes even deeper. I have every reason to believe, Monsieur, that there is a conspiracy against your government of which I was to be made the unconscious tool, under the guise of newspaper enterprise. Do you know a German by the name of Brandt?"

"Not in this country—no. Such a man was once under arrest in Marseilles."

"And escaped, did he not? He belonged to the secret service?"

"Yes; I was not there, but my captain saw and described him to me—a large man, with round face, wearing spectacles; oh, yes, and a broken nose."

"Now wearing also a closely trimmed beard. He was in our office yesterday, and after he left the city editor assigned me to this case."

"Ah! and the editor?"

"Is German also; his name is Schmitt. But, perhaps, I had better explain everything as it occurred."

"That will give me clearer understanding."

"And require but a moment. I was alone in the reporters' room yesterday when this man came in. He asked for Schmitt by name, and, there being no boy present, and as he said he called by appointment, I took in his card; it read simply Johann Brandt. The city editor jumped up at once, and came out and shook hands with him, taking him into the private office, and closing the door. Then he put out his head again

to say he was not to be interrupted. Their greeting was in German, which I do not understand well, but I am sure Schmitt called his visitor Captain. Could that be?"

"Brandt was at one time in the army, I believe, as an officer."

She drew a deep breath.

"He walks straight like a soldier, and Schmitt told me once he served in the German army. That must be how they knew each other. Of course after the door was closed I heard nothing; indeed felt no interest, but went on with my work. They were together for half an hour, and when they came out were still talking earnestly in German. Schmitt went with him to the stairs, and stood watching his visitor descend. When he came back, he looked all around carefully, as though to make sure we were alone, and then asked me into his room, and closed the door. I stood beside the desk waiting, while he fumbled over some papers, and my eyes chanced to decipher among them a draft on a Berlin bank, made out to Emil Schmitt for a thousand dollars. Before I could see more he had shoved it out of sight, under some copy paper, and was giving me

orders, pretending to read from the assignment book."

She paused a moment, wetting her lips with a sip of claret, while I waited silently.

"He told me about your machine, where the hangar was, and how it was guarded. He gave me the number of your suite at the hotel, and knew all about the orders of the Consul. It was plain that ordinary newspaper methods of approach would be vain, and he suggested and outlined the plan I followed in making your acquaintance. To me, at the time, it was merely a professional matter, Monsieur—I was sent out by the *Press* to gain information of interest to its readers. You understand?"

"Perfectly," and I held out my hand to her across the table. "However, your tale is of interest."

Her face lighted up, and there was greater confidence in the tone of her voice.

"I am glad you can say that, and show you mean it," she said eagerly, and her fingers clasped mine just for an instant. "I—I was actually afraid you might think me a sneak, a spy. I am not, but did my part innocently. Yet, Monsieur,

I began to doubt the fairness of this assignment the moment I came out of that office. There were three things so peculiar as to attract my attention—the German draft, the fact that I was not told to write a line for the paper regarding my discoveries, and that all I was required to do was to form your acquaintance, and then induce you to accompany me to a designated place."

"There was to be no interview? no questioning?"

"Not by me. My understanding was Schmitt proposed attending to that himself. All he expected of me was to induce you to appear where he was. I was to be the stool-pigeon; that was what made me rebellious and suspicious of the whole affair. It was only womanly curiosity which led me to go this far, and newspaper instinct, perhaps. I wanted to uncover the story, and, incidentally, discover what sort of man you are."

"And now, Mademoiselle?"

She was the one to extend her hand frankly.

"Now I am on your side," she said gravely. "That is if you will accept of such an ally.

You need not hesitate," she added swiftly, "because I am a woman, for I can be of assistance, I know. You are a stranger here, while I am acquainted with every street and alley."

I gazed into her face, unconsciously noting its youthful enthusiasm, and then about the room crowded with guests. I could hardly comprehend the seriousness of the situation, yet my mind was busy with details. There was no reason why I should not accept her statement, or share in her suspicions. I had been warned before I left France, and was fully aware of the precautions taken at our military aviation meets to prevent discoveries by English and German agents. Beyond doubt I had been followed across the water, and the importance of the quest was evidenced by Brandt's being detailed to this service. He was a trusted agent of his government, with high rank in the secret service, and it was not likely he was alone. Indeed, I already had proof of their careful espionage in the fact that they knew all my plans, and had arranged this trap. What should I do now I was forewarned? Should I ignore the conspiracy, or boldly confront the conspirators? It

was the soldier in me that responded, for I was never a diplomat.

"This was not the place, then, where you were to take me?"

"No, Monsieur; that was the Café François."

"A French restaurant?" in surprise.

"In name, and pretense, only. Schmitt probably believed you would be more easily induced to go there. The place is not of high repute, and is conducted by an Italian with a French chef. I have never been there, but am told the other employees are a motley set. What do you think is best to do?"

"You are willing to trust yourself with me?"

"Absolutely," and her eyes met mine. "I know a man when I meet one."

"Then," and I smiled genially, "we will visit the Café François. May I be permitted to smoke, Mademoiselle?"

CHAPTER V

AT THE CAFÉ FRANÇOIS

WE walked as the distance was not great, and neither of us had any desire to attract attention, both realizing that the result of our adventure might prove unpleasant. Indeed I rather regretted my decision, but lacked courage to confess as much while my companion remained silent. I do not know the streets traversed, but as I remember we proceeded for a block away from the lake front, and then turned south. The lady spoke but once of her own volition, and made very brief replies to my efforts at being entertaining. It was after we had walked south some distance, and pedestrians had become fewer, that she asked suddenly:

"You are armed, Monsieur?"

"Yes; you anticipate trouble?"

"Hardly that, but it is well to be prepared. I have heard unpleasant stories of the place, and

I do not know the exact character of the men you are seeking."

"Brandt has the reputation in Europe of being equal to any expedient to attain his ends," I said quietly. "Perhaps that is why I am rather anxious to cross swords with him. This man Schmitt is an unknown."

"Schmitt! Oh, he will be content with a silent part. There is no danger of his getting in the way of any harm. But there are probably others here under Brandt's orders."

"Likely enough, although he usually prefers to operate alone."

There was a pause during which I glanced aside at the contour of her face through the haze of my cigar.

"Do you regret coming?" I asked finally, almost hoping she did. "For if so we can turn back. Really it is nothing to me; principally a curiosity to see the fellow."

She turned her face up to look at me in surprise.

"I! Why certainly not. You do not understand, Monsieur, the newspaper instinct. This looks to me like a good story, and I would n't

lose my chance at writing it for the world and getting a scoop."

"Oh, then I am to comprehend your interest is altogether professional, Mademoiselle? That is not flattering."

She laughed, her hand pressing my sleeve.

"It is far better for you to think that than be deceived. Surely you could not expect me to fight to preserve a French secret?"

"My hope was a personal one rather," I ventured recklessly. "That you might have some interest in a Frenchman."

"Why of course I have. I confess I wish you to win; perhaps I may even help you, if I see a way clear; of course," she added mischievously, "if it does n't endanger my job."

"Your what, Mademoiselle?"

"My position; you must remember this play is about to be staged in the presence of my city editor. It therefore behooves me to act well my part, and preserve a strict neutrality. You must not expect too much."

"But you are more than a reporter."

"You would not think so, if you had to live on my salary."

"That is not my meaning—you are also a woman."

"Why remind me of that misfortune! The newspaper game is the one place where sex is forgotten—except as occasionally good bait for an interview. Oh, no, Monsieur, while I wish you well in this night's adventure, I am to be a non-combatant, to count only as a mere looker on in Vienna!"

As suddenly the light raillery in her voice changed to a tone of seriousness.

"Of course circumstances might arise to cause the woman to overcome the reporter. One never knows, and there are times when I fail to understand myself. Do you speak Spanish, Monsieur?"

"Indifferently; just sufficient to get along in Madrid," I answered, surprised at the quick change. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because there might be occasion for us to exchange words unknown to the others. If so, remember I speak the tongue. It may prove of value."

"Then you must really mean that I can rely upon you in an emergency."

"I have made no promise; rather it is more the nature of a warning, because you have reminded me that I was more than a reporter. A woman, you know, is a strange combination. This is the Café François."

Outwardly, at least, the place appeared respectable enough, the front brilliantly lighted, but the interior scene obscured by clouded glass. Besides the main swinging doors, there was a smaller one with "Ladies' Entrance" lettered on it, and we entered through this, finding ourselves in a narrow hall, leading directly to a rear room. This, while evidently not the main dining-hall, was sufficiently large and commodious, containing tables of varying sizes prepared for guests, and a few booths arranged for privacy. Many of the tables were occupied, and noise and loud voices proclaimed the presence of a convivial set. A piano played furiously, and on one side of the room, in a vacant space, a few couples were dancing.

"Table, sir?"

"Yes," the lady answered for me. "The small one next the wall, please."

As we were being seated, and the waiter left us

to find a printed menu, she leaned across to whisper swiftly:

"We must order something—any trifle, with drinks. Our party is at the next table to the right. Don't look; let them make the first move."

I glanced at them as I scanned the bill, ordering a salad with a bottle of champagne. There were, somewhat to my surprise, four in the party, two unmistakably German, the others not so easily classified. Directly fronting us, and hence facing the door, was a tall, rather cadaverous person, with iron-gray hair, hollow cheeks, and light-colored mustache, his blue eyes partly concealed by heavy glasses. Mentally I decided this must be Schmitt, although he was hardly the type I anticipated. Beside him sat a younger man, very debonair in appearance, with red cheeks, and pink and white complexion. He was doing most of the talking, describing some incident on shipboard in excellent English, while the others, apparently interested in his recital, were leaning forward, forgetful of their meal. The faces of the two with backs toward me were hidden, but one was large, with almost

colossal shoulders, and a dark beard closely trimmed. I noticed how upright he sat in his chair in contradistinction to the other, a small sandy-haired fellow with waxed mustache, and long, thin neck. I contented myself with a single glance, deciding instantly that the larger individual was Brandt, and feeling only slight interest in the others. He was the one to watch and fear, and I knew instinctively he was likely to prove himself no mean antagonist. I remember feeling amused at the soberness of Miss Probyn's watchful eyes as my gaze returned to her face. The adventure was beginning to be entertaining, and I was already confident enough of its final outcome to feel slightly amused.

"Do you recognize the others?" I asked softly.

She shook her head negatively; then said slowly in Spanish.

"Do you understand? Yes; then listen, but do not answer in English. The younger man is a reporter on one of the German papers, but I have never before seen the fellow sitting beside Brandt. Has Schmitt appeared to notice me yet?"

"No; he is listening to the story."

"All make-believe; the whole four saw us when we came in. They will begin the game in a minute. Don't be surprised at anything I may do, Monsieur, and keep your eyes and ears open."

We sat there sipping our wine, and conversing carelessly. As her back was toward the other table, I easily kept them in view, but could observe no sign that we had been recognized. Finally the German reporter excused himself and withdrew, passing our table without so much as a glance, yet he had scarcely disappeared, before Schmitt stepped across the narrow aisle, and spoke to my companion.

"Why, Miss Probyn," he exclaimed, his slight foreign accent barely perceptible. "This is the last place I would expect to meet you. However, all the greater pleasure," and he extended his hand, smiling genially behind his glasses. "You have met Captain Brandt? No! Oh, then, permit me—Captain Brandt, Miss Probyn, and—ah, Herr Franzen, of Berlin, Miss Probyn—old friends from the Fatherland, indulging in reminiscences, inspired by the national beverage," and he swept a glance over the half-emptied steins littering the table. "Ger-

mans are Germans the world over, you know. I —I think I have never met your friend."

She was standing facing them, and I also arose to my feet.

"My friend," she said pleasantly, " happens to be traveling incognito, so names do not count for much—Mr. Gray, of Boston, gentlemen."

Brandt was the picture of courtesy, bowing politely, while not a change of expression appeared on his somewhat stolid face. Schmitt's pale blue eyes sought those of the girl in a swift questioning, but Herr Franzen, his face reddened by drink, was evidently in an ugly mood, and glared at me without acknowledgment.

"Huh!" he snapped, twisting his waxed ends insolently. "Champagne; our new friend must be a millionaire."

"The wine is paid for," I replied, holding my temper, "and another bottle will be ordered if Messieurs will join with us?"

"Messieurs! Bah! I smelt a Frenchman at the first whiff."

"Be quiet, Franzen," and Brandt gripped the drunken fool none too gently. "Sit down and hold your tongue. Your pardon, Monsieur,"

and he turned to me smilingly. "This fellow is always most patriotic when sodden with beer, but it is the case of a barking dog. We will join you with pleasure, only I insist on giving the order. Draw up your table next to ours."

Willing enough to permit affairs to shape themselves I accepted the exchange of places. The lady's eyes flashed warning into mine, but I felt little need of the admonishment. While beyond doubt Franzen had been drinking, yet he was not drunk, but was deliberately exaggerating his condition. For what purpose? either to throw me off my guard, or else to provoke a quarrel. His insolence was part of a well conceived plot; these fellows were here with a prearranged plan, a concerted purpose in view, yet I could only sit quiet watching for the card to be played next. The delay was not a long one, although we conversed idly over the wine, which Franzen, however, refused to touch, leaning back in his chair and glowering across at me. I chose to ignore him utterly, directing my entire conversation at Brandt, whose individuality interested me at once. Here was the man I must measure swords with. Nevertheless I

Brandt gripped him none too gently

made no attempt to probe the man, contenting myself with the commonplace; it was Miss Probyn, taking advantage of her sex, who ventured personal questions.

"Are you really an officer of the German Army, Captain Brandt?" she asked innocently. "I am so interested."

"Not at present—no," he acknowledged frankly. "Indeed, I am seldom called Captain any more except by old comrades. Schmitt here and I served together, but it is ten years since I resigned from the army." His response was in English, scarcely marred by the slightest accent.

"Not in government service then?"

"No," indifferently, yet with a swift glance at her face across the table. "Traveling altogether for pleasure, and renewing old acquaintances."

"In these days I presume you meet with a good many in America," I interposed carelessly.

"They are scattered about everywhere. I ran into Schmitt here merely by accident. Had n't seen him before for twenty years until yesterday. 'T is not so with your countrymen, Mon-

sieur—they do not scatter as the Germans."

"Taking it for granted I am French."

"I supposed that was admitted," laughingly. "Really nationality has little weight with me, Monsieur. I have lived under so many flags that I am a true cosmopolitan. Herr Franzen, here, remains intensely patriotic, but I have learned long ago that manhood has no race lines. Am I to understand you desire to remain incognito?"

"Certainly not; that was merely a joke of Miss Probyn's."

"Then it will be my privilege to name you to my friends."

"You recognize me?"

"Of course. I have traveled widely in France, and have even visited the aviation ground at Nice. Your presence in Chicago is no secret, and pictures of you have frequently appeared in the newspapers of Paris and Berlin. I recognized you at once—gentlemen," and he glanced about at the others, "the distinguished aviator, Lieutenant Dessaud."

Knowing what I did this byplay was most amusing. I even ventured to smile aside at Miss

Probyn, while acknowledging this new introduction with a bow, but the good humor felt did not in the least throw me off my guard. That Brandt was a secret agent, specially detailed to learn all he could relative to my monoplane, was beyond discussion. Directly, or indirectly, the other two men with him, were also interested to the same end. How highly important my discoveries were rated was evidenced by the amount of money already paid Schmitt merely to arrange this apparently accidental meeting. It alone was proof positive that Brandt was prepared to go far to attain his ends. Nor was he one to waste effort. The present masquerade of good-fellowship was only a step in some prearranged plan, an effort to make me feel at ease. What that plan was I could not, as yet, even guess, yet dimly I connected its revealment with the disappearance of the German reporter, and the pretended drunkenness of Franzen. The latter was so poor an actor I was compelled to suspicion him, but not by so much as a glance in his direction, did I reveal my suspicions to his chief. But the fellow was not content to remain unnoticed. He struck the table with one

hand, tipping over a half-filled glass, in an endeavor to attract attention.

"Dessaud! Dessaud!" he repeated, hiccoughing the name derisively. "Bah! I've heard of him; he's got a damn toy. Who ever heard of a French mechanic?"

"I think the world has heard of several," I answered, surprised at this outbreak, yet holding my temper, "and the toy flies."

"How about Rheims? Did it fly then, Monsieur Frenchman?"

"A plane broke; accidents are always possible." My glance fell upon the man's extended hand; it was that of a mechanic, with stubby fingers, and close clipped nails. So he was the expert. "You have such even in Germany."

"Maybe so," stubbornly, "but your whole principle is wrong."

"What do you know about that?"

"What do I know—"

Brandt's hand gripped the fellow's arm.

"That's enough, Franzen," he said, sternly. "We are not here to discuss aviation, or quarrel over flags. Finish your beer, and we'll go."

He leaned closer to me, and whispered.

"We 'll leave the drunken fool at the hotel. I would like a moment's quiet talk with you somewhere."

"But I am with Miss Probyn."

"A brief appointment tomorrow morning will do, Monsieur. I have a proposition to make which may be of interest, of great interest."

"I cannot imagine—"

"Of course not. However it is not a matter to be discussed here. I ask for only ten minutes at, let us say, nine tomorrow. Your hotel?"

"The Congress."

"My own also; very convenient. I take it for granted the request is granted. Schmitt, let 's get Franzen to bed."

We all arose together, and passed out into the rather narrow entry-way. Schmitt was talking with Miss Probyn, while Brandt held to Franzen, thus leaving me for the moment alone. The proposition for a conference in the morning had relieved me of any fears for the present. I must wait till then to learn more definitely what was being attempted. Brandt, by making this engagement, had apparently accomplished all he desired. I had no longer any reason to suspect

trickery, or a resort to violence. Without doubt the German considered me approachable, and would attempt the money argument. Very well I would learn then what he considered my discoveries worth, and could laugh at him. The thought restored me to good humor.

I was chuckling over the situation when Schmitt and Miss Probyn disappeared through the swinging doors onto the sidewalk. Almost at the same instant these opened inward, and the red-faced reporter burst in hastily, coming face to face with Franzen. I heard an oath, and the sound of a blow; someone toppled over against me, forcing me to press against the side wall for support. Then I was struck on the head from behind, and went down like a log.

CHAPTER VI

BRANDT SHOWS HIS HAND

THE blow felled me flat, and I had but the vaguest impression of what was taking place. While not rendered totally unconscious, yet my brain was numbed, and it seemed impossible for me to move a muscle. However, I realized, in a dim, impersonal way, that I was lifted up, carried swiftly across the walk outside, and thrust into a cab. I retained a flickering recollection of Brandt's face pressed close to mine in the glare of an electric light, and heard Franzen laugh spitefully.

"He 's dead to the world," said someone. "Turn on the juice, Carl; give her the limit."

Then my head fell back on someone's shoulder, and I lost all consciousness. I retain some slight recollection of being aroused again when the cab stopped, of far-away voices talking, and of being lifted out. Then I lapsed again into total darkness. When I awakened the second time

I was lying half-dressed on a bed. There was no light in the room, but an open doorway revealed a second apartment in which lights were burning. I saw no one, yet almost the first sound distinguished was that hateful laugh of Franzen. It brought me to an instant realization of all that had occurred.

"Not much reward for the risk, Captain," he said clearly in German. "These letters tell nothing."

"We 've got the man, have n't we?" was the gruff answer.

"Yes, if that is any comfort, but there is no proof that he will talk."

"You can leave that to me; he 'll either talk, or not fly. Did Schmitt say he could n't speak German?"

"Sure; that 's what the girl said. It was her business to find out. You got his gun?"

"In the drawer there—a nasty weapon. Better look at the fellow again, Fritz."

I heard a chair pushed back, and lay flat with my eyes closed, hoping the investigator would deem me still unconscious, and go back to his conversation. There was much I desired to

learn, and the easiest method was to use my ears. I was surprised at the fellows' boldness, their resorting to the strong-arm; this alone was evidence they were acting under urgent orders. My first theory that money was to be the appeal had utterly failed. They had adopted a shorter and uglier means to obtain their end. How much farther would they venture, if I proved obstinate? The prospect was not pleasant, and I comprehended my own helplessness, unless I learned more of the situation. Yet, I confess, what troubled me most was the apparent perfidy of the young woman. I had trusted her, believed in her friendship, still it was clear enough now that she must have deliberately lured me on to this rough manhandling, and then stood idly by while I was being hustled away. But did she? If so, if she was that sort, a willing part of the conspiracy, why should she have deceived them relative to my knowledge of German? I certainly had reason to bless her for that.

All these thoughts flashed through my mind as I lay there with closed eyes, barely permitting myself to breathe, while Franzen silently crossed

the room and bent over me. It seemed as if he would never finish, as he stood with fingers on my wrist counting the pulse, but finally, he released his grasp and turned away. Through slightly parted lashes I watched him disappear into the other room; then lifted my head to listen.

"Still dead to the world," he reported shortly, and a shadow on the wall told me he had paused to pour out a drink. "You must have soaked him good."

"A bit harder than I intended," returned Brandt composedly, "but it is all right; he 'll come around. We 'll give him a half hour more," and I heard the snap of his watch, "and then try the cold water cure. Go down and call up Schmitt on the 'phone, Fritz. I want to be sure he has got that girl safely corralled."

"Where is he?"

"Probably at the *Press* office by this time, unless he has had trouble with the woman. She made some fuss, did n't she?"

"I did n't wait to see. I was busy helping you lug the fellow to the cab. Why should she? She was in on the deal?"

"Only partly; I wanted Schmitt to get hold of the right kind, and slip her some coin, but I guess he did n't want to spare any. He said she did n't need to know; he 'd make her believe it was a newspaper job, and she 'd fall for it easy enough. I guess she did too, but that strong-arm work was pretty raw, and she did n't look to me the sort to stand quiet. Did you notice her particularly?"

"Only that she was a mighty pretty girl, and her eyes were always laughing."

"There was more to them than that, Fritz, a damn sight more, and there was character in her face. It will take a smarter man than Schmitt to make a fool out of her. If, by any chance, she has taken a fancy to this Frenchman, she 's likely to make trouble. Go on now, and call Schmitt up, and hurry back; then we 'll stir up Monsieur."

I could perceive the fellow's shadow as he passed across the outer room, and then heard the click of a closing door. Brandt remained silent, except for the soft rustling of some papers, and I slipped quietly out of bed. There was light enough to enable me to find my discarded clothes

lying across a chair, and I donned these garments hastily, pausing only to assure myself the pockets had been emptied, only leaving me my money. It occurred to me suddenly that this had been the original purpose of the attack—a desire to secure my papers. Brandt would naturally imagine that I would have on my person some memoranda of my invention, if not a detailed sketch. That would be all he would require. Likely enough he merely expected to rob me of these papers, leave me in the cab, and escape. But he discovered nothing, not so much as a scrap, and so was driven to other extremes. Yet this very disappointment might lead to desperate measures, and—the cold chills ran over me as I realized the truth—no one would ever know into whose hands I had fallen. Even should I utterly disappear no friend of mine would ever be able to guess how it had occurred. Few of them knew just where I was staying. Miss Probyn alone possessed sufficient knowledge to pull aside the curtains, but was she friend or foe? Probably neither; merely one drawn unknowingly into the affair, and glad enough now to slip quietly out of sight, when she realized

its seriousness. My only hope of escape lay then in my own efforts.

I glided across to the nearest window, which was open, and looked out. Below was a sheer expanse of wall, revealing, perhaps, three stories down, a dingy glass dome through which light shown dimly. This would enclose the hotel lobby, but escape that way was clearly impossible, the slight coping along the wall barely two inches wide. I sought in vain for some weapon, but found none; very well, if I must fight my way out with naked hands, it would be better to have only one antagonist than two. Brandt was a giant of a man, and, no doubt, knew the game, but I would have more chance with him alone than I would if he had the assistance of the mechanic. I started forward, only to crouch down just inside the door. I was already too late—Franzen had returned.

"Well!" growled the chief, in no pleasant humor, "you took your time."

"I could n't get a booth, and the line was working badly."

"Cut that and get to the business; what did Schmitt say?"

"He let the girl go home; said she was hysterical, and he was afraid to have her around the office. Sent her off in a cab."

"Where does she live?"

"I never asked."

"Oh, hell! Do you call that a head you have got on your shoulders? It 's too late now; we 'll have to risk her. Did you see Eisenbarth anywhere about?"

"He is in the lobby, watching the elevators."

"What did he have to say?"

"It 's all quiet out there. Kelly goes on guard all right at midnight, but the two Frenchmen sleep in the hangar. One of them drank heavily, but the other would n't touch the stuff."

"Just as I sized it up, Fritz," the chief's tone evidencing better humor. "They told me in Berlin that De Vigne could n't be touched, but his assistant drank like a fish. Oh, well, one man ought not to be very hard to handle; I 'm equal to that myself," and he struck the table with his fist, thrusting back a chair as he arose to his feet. "Come on, let 's go in, and stir up Monsieur; we 've got to get action in the next few hours."

There was nothing left me to do but fight. I straightened up, desperate and ready. Whichever came first was the man. I hoped it might be Brandt, but in this I was disappointed. It was into Franzen's face I sent my clinched fist, hurling the fellow headlong across the room. The next instant I was at his chief, taking him sufficiently by surprise to get in two short-arm jolts before he gripped me. He had the strength of a gorilla, and, although I fought like a fiend to break away, his vise-like fingers forced a passage to my throat, and I was borne back choking for breath, with his huge body holding me prone. We fell in the narrow hall-way, still struggling madly. The outside door opened, scraping my head as it swung, and two men leaped in. Through the mist darkening my vision I saw one wore the uniform of a bell-boy. It was the other, a stocky fellow with stubby mustache, who spoke, dragging Brandt off me, and forcing him to loosen his grip on my throat, as it seemed to me just in time.

"Here now! What 's all this mean? Do you think you are in a bar-room? Let loose!"

For the life of me I could not speak, my swol-

len tongue fairly choking me, but Brandt grasped the situation in an instant.

"It 's all right," he said, handing out a card. "I am Captain Brandt, and this is one of my party," indicating me. "Crazy drunk, you understand, and we 're trying to keep him in the room until we can sober him up, that 's all. You are the hotel officer?"

"Yes, sir," more politely. "Need any help handling the fellow?"

"No; he 'll be quiet enough now; there 's two of us here, only he took us by surprise that time. Sorry to have made such a row."

He slipped a bill into the officer's hand, and lifted me back into a chair. I made a desperate effort to speak, to declare myself, but the words would not articulate; I could only pant painfully for breath. I saw the detective eyeing me, his hand on the knob of the door.

"All right, Captain," he said finally. "He looks quiet enough now; just call me if you need any help. What 's your friend's name?"

"Von Eisel—Baron Von Eisel; he 's not registered here."

"Oh, I see; well good night, sir."

"Good night, officer."

The door closed, and Brandt walked over and locked it. Then he came back, smiling broadly, and whirled me around in the chair so I would face the light. At the same moment Franzen made his appearance, both hands pressed against his eye. The woe-begone look of the fellow made me smile, even as I gasped for breath. Brandt turned his head to see what had amused me, and burst out laughing.

"We 've learned something tonight, hey, Fritz!" he said gayly. "That there is one Frenchman who knows how to use his fists. Where did you master that art, Monsieur?"

I shook my head, but straightened up in the chair, feeling a slight return of strength, and with it a new desire to meet the issues squarely. At least I meant to know exactly what Brandt's purpose was, and how he proposed achieving it. Yet I had no wish to assume the initiative. Fortunately there was no necessity for my doing so, as Brandt was anxious to disarm me of suspicion. Almost with his first smooth utterance I grasped his intention, and determined to permit myself to be persuaded.

"Go bathe your eye, Franzen, while I have a talk with Monsieur," he said shortly. "There is some misunderstanding, I think," and he turned again to me, smoothing his ruffled cuffs. "What did all this attempt at violence mean?"

"It rather occurs to me that I am the proper one to ask that question," I returned, finding my voice with difficulty still. "I was struck unconscious, and then held prisoner here."

"Oh, that 's it!" he gave vent to a short laugh. "Well, perhaps your mistake is natural enough. However the truth is you were struck accidentally in a street fracas, and were brought here out of kindness."

"Then, I presume, I am at liberty to depart?"

"Oh—why; certainly, as soon as you are capable of looking after yourself alone."

"Probably you retain my personal property on expense account?"

"Your personal property!"

"Certainly; my revolver, and private letters."

He glanced aside at the table, nonplused for a moment, but as instantly recovering assurance.

"Oh, exactly; really do you know I had actually forgotten. You see they fell out of your

pockets, and we picked them up," and to my surprise he swept the papers together, handed them to me, then opened a drawer, and gave me the weapon. It was done with such an air of good-fellowship that I could only stare at him, my hand gripping the revolver butt.

"Nice weapon," he commented easily, "latest automatic model, I see; I am something of a connoisseur in fire-arms; acquired the taste in the army. To tell the truth I was almost tempted to keep that gun, and report to you that it was lost in the skirmish. Still, of the two, I rather believe I prefer to retain your confidence. Fact of the matter is, Dessaud," and he leaned back comfortably in his chair, "you are about the first Frenchman I ever cared to be friendly with."

"The form your friendship takes," I commented sarcastically, "would not prove a recommendation to many."

"You can scarcely blame me for protecting myself; remember you were the aggressor."

It was sufficiently plain that his present purpose was to win my confidence. Unaware that I had overheard his indiscreet conversation with Franzen, he preferred to substitute diplomacy

to force. Under the circumstances I could do nothing better than encourage the effort. However there was no apparent reason why I should not call his hand, and be blunt about it.

"All right, let it go at that," I said quietly. "And now, Brandt, what is it you want? I am not simple enough to believe all this is an accident. If there is any understanding to be come at, state your purpose. I 'll answer you promptly enough."

"That sounds like a declaration of war."

"Whether peace or war depends on your demands."

"Well!" he exclaimed, losing the grip on his temper. "It makes small odds to me which, if you want to know. You are going to give up one way or the other, my fine fellow, and I don't give a sou markee, whether I talk with money or fists."

"Try money first," I suggested, eager to have my value stated. "That will be easier."

He stared at me in perplexity, my cool demeanor a surprise, and unable to determine whether, or not, my proposition was made in earnest. Without doubt, however, he had been

accustomed to dealing with men who were for sale, and my willingness to be approached convinced him I belonged to the same class and could be bribed if he offered enough.

"I can offer $20,000 American gold," in a whisper, leaning closer.

"And protection?"

"Certainly; a little private matter between you and me."

"I do not trust Franzen," appearing to hesitate.

"That need n't interfere; I 'll send him out on some errand, and telephone for a public stenographer to be sent up here. She will take down what you have to say, and will never understand a word of it. When typed we 'll pay her to destroy the notes. That will protect all parties."

"What is it you want—exactly?"

"A technical description of your machine, describing accurately wherein it differs from the ordinary type. I am not an expert, but I know enough of such matters so as not to be deceived."

"You represent your government?"

He nodded, now thoroughly convinced of success, and no longer disguising his eagerness.

"Then you can offer more—the secret is worth more," I said calmly, realizing my surrender must not be too sudden.

He lit a cigarette, studying my face intently as he did so. My own mind was in something of a chaos. Was it necessary for me to remain and negotiate with the fellow? With the revolver in my possession why could I not force my release? Some suspicion halted me, for Brandt's very coolness left me with a vague feeling that the man was not alone, that I was still completely in his power. One of his hands was in the pocket of his coat, and I thought of a hidden weapon, and wondered if he had n't emptied my own revolver of its cartridges before handing it back. Convinced this must be true, I remained quiet awaiting his reply.

"What is your price?" he asked finally, a bit of ill concealed contempt in the tone.

"Suppose I say fifty thousand."

"Francs?"

"Hardly; I understood your offer to be in American money."

Without changing his attitude I could see the man's muscles stiffen, his teeth clinch.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked sharply. "That is your price?"

I nodded, wondering what I would do if he should accept. There was an instant of silence, and then, before he could speak three raps sounded on the outside door.

CHAPTER VII

A WOMAN INTERFERES

IGNORING my presence Brandt crossed the room, and disappeared in the narrow hall. I found as I already suspected, that my revolver was empty. This accounted then for his coolness—armed himself he had no fear of me, with only that useless weapon with which to wage battle. I sank back into my chair, calm enough to all outward appearance, but with every nerve throbbing. He came back accompanied by two men; one was Franzen, the other a stranger with drooping blonde mustache, and heavily arched brows. While Brandt locked the door, this fellow stood and stared at me in silence, and something in his expression caused me to rise to my feet. It was the Captain, however, who spoke first, advancing to the table.

"Well, Dessaud," he said more roughly than before. "I guess we understand each other, and need spar no longer. You know why I am here,

and what I am after. I take it I am not entirely unknown to you by reputation?"

"I have heard of you before."

"Most French officers have," he confessed dryly, but with a smile of satisfaction. "That knowledge ought to make my work easier. For instance you are aware that I never betray a secret, and never let go when I once take hold. Is this true?"

"That is your reputation—yes."

"Then listen; you are in my power, absolutely in my power. No one except those in my employ have the slightest conception as to what has become of you. I can take your life, and it will merely remain a mystery. No one in this hotel knows who you are, or will ever suspect your identity. You are helpless to defend yourself; the revolver I just returned to you is unloaded. Now the only question is, are you going to be sensible, and give me the information I seek, or shall we have to drill it out of you? I am indifferent as to your choice, for we are prepared for either emergency. As to your price, it is too high; my limit is twenty-five thousand dollars."

"You offer that?"

"Yes."

"And if I refuse, you intend to try and force the information from me. May I ask how?"

"You may ask, certainly, but we keep our own counsel," smiling pleasantly enough. "That, however, is a procedure in which I have seldom failed. I think, Monsieur, you must perceive the helplessness of your position, and, I trust, will accept my terms, which, you must confess, are most generous."

"I refuse them," I returned coldly, and sat down again in my chair, staring into their faces. "I am a French soldier."

No one moved, only Franzen and the other glanced aside at Brandt, as though expecting orders. It seemed to me the latter hesitated, as if puzzled at my sudden decision.

"Don't be a fool, Dessaud," he exclaimed sullenly. "This is between us alone; you better accept the money."

"No; I have answered you."

"From whom do you expect help, man? The Consul and your two machinists alone know you are in the city—surely it is n't that woman?" He laughed, glancing aside at the fellow with

the mustache. "You might tell him what has become of the girl, Swigert."

"She was watched in her own home," the other rumbled. "I know. I just come from there."

"You are still obstinate?"

"The whereabouts of Miss Probyn can be of no special interest to me," I said, yet conscious of a vague disappointment. "I refuse, not from any hope of escape, but because I hold my honor of more value than my life."

"Yet you set a price."

"Pardon, Messieurs, but I did not. I mentioned a price to test the value of my invention. Personally I am not for sale."

"Your decision is final?"

"It is—go on."

"We will go on. You have a lesson to learn yet. Stand up! Now hear me. We, the four of us, are going down the elevator, and will take a cab waiting at the front door. You will walk with me, Monsieur, and Swigert and Franzen will be just behind. I advise you not to attempt breaking away, or raising any alarm. The house detective will meet us in the hall, and accom-

pany us to the door. He supposes you to be Baron Von Eisel, a friend of ours, crazed with drink, whom we are taking home. He is paid to think so. Any break on your part will result in some rough handling. Franzen, put Lieutenant Dessaud's hat on his head. Now, Monsieur, permit me to take your arm."

An instant I hesitated, even stepped back against the wall, half inclined to resistance. Yet the odds were too great for me to battle single-handed against three armed men. Swigert gripped my shoulder savagely, and swung me into the center of the room.

"Maybe you want me to show you!" he growled, "how we handle men in the German barracks? You go quiet—hey?"

Brandt took my arm, his grasp firm.

"Come on, Dessaud," he said quietly. "That is no use."

I realized it, but was too angry for words. Besides anything would be better than this room. Franzen opened the door, and turned out the lights, and I permitted Brandt to lead me forth into the hall. The house detective stood leaning against the stair-rail, watching us curiously.

"Still 'bug'?" he asked, indifferently.

"Nothing serious," returned Brandt, urging me toward the elevator. "Only a bit quarrelsome; thinks we 're trying to rob him. You better come along, officer, until we get him safely outside."

We were alone in the elevator, and I was crowded back into one corner. The utter uselessness of attempting resistance, or of making any appeal for help, was apparent. The very presence of the hotel officer left me helpless. Yet my brain was active enough, and I was alert for the slightest opportunity. There were several men scattered about the lobby, and, perhaps, a half dozen women visible in an ante-room beyond. A single swift glance informed me this was not the Congress, although from appearance a hotel of high grade, the furnishing expensive, and in excellent taste. The clock above the clerk's desk told me the hour—a quarter of eleven. Almost before I realized what was happening I had been hustled across the lobby onto the sidewalk in front. Strange as I was to the city nothing familiar greeted me in my swift glance up and down the street. My guards

gave me no opportunity to perceive much, closing tightly about, and pressing me hastily forward. The taxi stood slightly at one side the hotel entrance, but I caught a glimpse of the chauffeur's face in the blaze of electric light, as I was unceremoniously thrust through the open door—he was the reporter, Eisenbarth. Franzen and Swigert jammed themselves into the back seat on either side of me, still gripping my arms, and Brandt had one foot on the step, when he paused suddenly, and closed the door.

"Wait a minute," he said shortly, "until I use the telephone."

Helpless to move, crushed in as I was, I could see the hotel entrance, and watched him disappear, leaving the house-detective loitering in the door-way. No one spoke, except for a growl from one of my guards as I attempted to assume an easier posture. The glass windows were up in front, and the chauffeur appeared only as a mere shadow. During those few moments there was borne in upon me a full consciousness of my desperate situation. Previously I had taken the matter rather lightly, unable to comprehend how such an outrage as this could be consummated in

the very heart of the city. I was not unknown, or friendless even in Chicago; to my countrymen my name stood for much, and there were many all about who would rally at a word to my relief. It had seemed to me that could I once escape from that room up stairs any appeal for help would meet with instant response. Yet the possibility of my attempting such an escape had been anticipated, and guarded against. I was merely a drunken fool, being taken home by friends, under direction of the hotel police officer. Any appeal I might make would only be laughed at. And these fellows were in earnest; they were prepared to go far in attaining their ends. This was a plot, well conceived and thought out. From the first appearance of Miss Probyn the object of every move was to get me into their possession; it had all been planned, the quarrel at the café, the room rented in this obscure hotel, the rifling of my pockets, the offer of money. And now, when all these means of learning my secret had failed, these men were equally prepared to go on with even more desperate tactics. Eisenbarth had not asked where he was to drive the machine; he already knew.

I did not, yet my mind grasped one probable fact—I was either to be taken to some rendezvous, where I could be safely kept from discovery, or else to the hangar where my monoplane was under guard. The latter supposition did not appear reasonable in view of the fact that such an appearance would involve the danger of exposure. Brandt would never risk that, except as a last resort. He was a secret agent, and his ability to produce results depended largely on his presence being unknown. From the conversation overheard it was evident my men had been already tampered with—the Pinkerton guard—or one of them, at least—bought, and Ramon rendered useless by intoxicants. But De Vigne remained sober and watchful, and the hangar could not be broken into without creating alarm. No, the object must be to get me where I could be handled, tortured if need be, and driven to reveal all I knew. And I could expect little mercy, once they deemed themselves safe. I had heard whispers of Brandt's methods in Europe; diplomatic and smiling as he appeared outwardly, by nature he belonged to the age of the Inquisition. To attain his ends he

would not hesitate at any desperate expedient. The outlook was not a pleasant one.

The house-detective disappeared within; there were occasional passers-by, yet I was guarded too closely to make any disturbance. I thought I saw someone loitering in the dark doorway of a railway ticket office opposite the cab window, but could not distinctly distinguish the form. Then Brandt emerged under the glare of electric light, and stepped forth onto the broad sidewalk. As he appeared the figure flitted out from the shadows, and approached him. It was a woman, wearing a loose wrap. They exchanged perhaps a dozen words, although the man did not speak but once. Then they advanced across the walk together, and Brandt flung open the door of the cab. The next instant he had grasped her arm, and thrust her inside, springing in after her. I heard her utter a quick, smothered exclamation of surprise, felt her extended hands grasp me to keep from falling; then the cab started roughly with a jerk, and someone pressed her back into a corner of the front seat, while Brandt squeezed himself in beside her. Except for the occasional flash of a street lamp we were

in utter darkness. I could barely distinguish the figures opposite, yet I knew the woman struggled to get to her feet, only to be thrust back helpless by Brandt who gripped both her hands.

"Keep still!" he ordered sharply. "You 've shoved yourself into this affair, now, you 'll take the consequences, young lady. Be quiet, I say! There is no harm going to be done you, only I 'll put you where you can't talk for awhile."

The woman, whoever she was, made no outcry, but drew her hands indignantly from his grasp, and shrank back into her corner of the cab, cowering there. Enveloped in her loose wrap, she was but a shapeless shadow, and, even in the occasional flashes of light, I was unable to distinguish the outline of her features. In truth I was so deeply concerned with my own predicament that my interest in her was only momentary. If her interjection into the game was some outcome of Brandt's love affairs it in no way concerned itself with me. Staring out as best I could I endeavored to determine where we were going, but my slight knowledge of the streets of the city was a serious handicap. Once

I felt confident we turned onto Michigan Avenue, heading south, for there was a park on the left, and the street was illumined by clustered lights. The cab was traveling rapidly, so much so that Brandt rapped sharply on the glass front, and ordered the chauffeur to slow down:

"Not so fast," he snapped angrily. "We cannot afford to be stopped, and taken to a police station."

Crushed in as we were any movement looking toward escape was useless. I endeavored to count the cross-streets, but became confused and lost tally. Then we whirled to the left over a block or two of rough pavement, made a circle through what appeared like a small park, and came forth into an ill-lighted street. As near as I could determine our course was still south, and we skirted a stone wall, perhaps eight or ten feet high, partially overgrown with foliage. I was hardly sure as to this, until the machine suddenly swerved, and ran in through an open gate, plunging us into complete darkness beneath the shadow of overhanging trees. But the chauffeur evidently knew the way, for, with lights extinguished, he half-circled twice on

a noiseless road-way, and then came to a stop.

"Open the door, Fritz," said Brandt, leaning over to peer past us. "You and Swigert take care of your man; I 'll look after the girl. Don't let go of him."

I was pulled forth rather roughly, but on reaching my feet outside, could perceive we were in the shadow of a large building, apparently a residence, but with no light visible anywhere. Just before us was a flight of stone steps. The two men gripped my arms urging me along a narrow walk which led to a basement door. I hung back just enough to anger them, while Brandt forced the woman to alight.

"Drive in under the cover, and wait," he commanded the chauffeur. "Cut out your cigarettes; someone might see the light. Now young lady."

She sprang back, tearing the sleeve of her wrap as she jerked it out of his fingers. Franzen, with a German oath, released his grasp on me and grabbed for her, and, before she could round the cab wheel, the Captain had her. She struck him once, struggling to break free, and the fellow laughed, crushing her arms down.

"That 's enough, you little girl," he sneered, "come on now."

"I will not," the voice trembling, but determined. "Take your hands off me."

It was then I knew who she was, and, with one supreme effort, wrenched myself free from Swigert, and leaped straight at Brandt's throat.

CHAPTER VIII

TRAPPED

I REACHED him, gripping his collar with one hand, and driving my fist twice into his face, hurling him back against the tonneau. Yet they were three to one, the chauffeur springing from his seat to help, while Franzen clung to the girl. Swigert's arms jerked me back, someone kicked me savagely in the side, and then I felt the muzzle of a revolver pressed against my cheek. Dark as it was I could see a gash across Brandt's chin from which blood dripped.

"I marked you anyway," I jeered up at him, unable to move, "you brute."

"You 'll find out what I am soon enough now," he answered, panting slightly from exertion. "That blow won't make things any easier for you. I pay my debts, Monsieur. Come on now, unless you prefer to be shot."

I got to my feet slowly, but not at all frightened by his threat.

"There are too many of you for me," I acknowledged, rubbing my knuckles, and endeavoring to distinguish the presence of the girl, "but I am not afraid of your shooting."

"You mean I do not dare?"

"Well, partly that; rather, however, there would be nothing for you to gain—I am worth more to you alive."

"You would be as valuable wounded."

"Yet you will not risk it. Where is Miss Probyn?"

"Out of your way. But this is enough talk until we are inside. No one is going to injure the girl if she will behave herself. That you, Franzen? Safe, hey? All right, now I guess the two of us can handle this French cockerel. You stay with the car, Eisenbarth. Come, Lieutenant, you may as well go along quietly, unless you enjoy being hurt."

The basement door had been left open, and between them I was shoved into the dark passage beyond. Someone closed and locked the outer barrier and then switched on an electric light, revealing a flight of stairs. Realizing my inability to resist, and more impressed now with

the fact that Helen Probyn was also being held prisoner in this house, than with my own danger, I obeyed instructions without a word, and ascended to the second story. The great hall we traversed, as well as the rooms into which I was ushered, gave evidence that this was a private home, the residence of someone possessing both wealth and refinement. The rugs on the floor, the furniture draped in denim, the choice pictures on the walls, revealed in the dim light, all combined to make this evident. The double shades at the windows were drawn closely, and Brandt turned on sufficient light so I could perceive something of my surroundings. We came to a halt in what was apparently a music room, as it contained a grand piano as well as a harp, and I was thrust down into a chair. Brandt muttered some words of instruction to the others in German, and they disappeared, leaving us alone together, the captain remaining between me and the door. He did not speak, although I noticed his right hand was hidden in his pocket, and his eyes watched me closely. For some moments I also remained silent, staring about the room, but the silence became oppres-

sive, and my curiosity overcame my contempt.

"I presume I am to consider myself a prisoner."

"For the present—yes. How long that state of affairs may continue will depend entirely upon yourself."

"You mean when I am prepared to reveal the secrets entrusted to me by my government?"

He bowed, nursing the cut on his chin.

"You have our offer, Monsieur."

My face flushed.

"Apparently your conception of the honor of a French officer is not high."

"This is not the first time I have put it to the test," he said lightly, "and think you will learn to see the value of freedom."

"But you cannot expect to hold me here indefinitely? I am not an unknown gutter rat."

"You might as well be, Monsieur," he replied, apparently quite at ease. "Do not deceive yourself as to any chance of rescue. I am too old at the game to be caught in that way. I presume you have no conception as to where you are at present."

"No, except that I am still in Chicago."

"A rather indefinite description, as Chicago is a large city, and hence one of the best hiding places in the world. You are in a private home, unoccupied for a year, and your whereabouts are unknown except to those connected with our secret service. The care-keeper is in my pay—Swigert. Meanwhile who is liable to be particularly interested in your disappearance? the French Consul, and a couple of mechanics. The police, bah!" and he smiled genially, waving his hand. "'T is easy enough to steer them wrong, Monsieur," leaning forward, and lowering his voice, "If you never came back, I do not believe it would create such a great stir—there could be reasons given, most plausible reasons, whispered here and there."

"That I had sold out?" I asked, gripping the arms of my chair. "That I had been untrue to France?"

"Why not? Who could tell otherwise? You would be neither the first, nor the last, Monsieur. We Germans get what we go after."

I drew in my breath sharply, perceiving in an instant the predicament in which this suave vil-

lain had placed me. It was true—if I disappeared, and these men, through force, or finesse, succeeded in learning the secrets of my monoplane, the construction would be obvious. No one would believe I had died in honor; no one would ever know.

"You perceive, Monsieur," Brandt went on calmly, grasping my thought. "'T is why we brought you here to this lonely house, that you might think over my liberal offer of recompense. It was dollars, not francs, Monsieur, and, they tell me, the West offers opportunities to energy, and—means. Is not life and money more to be sought than death and dishonor? 'T is to be considered, Monsieur."

"You threaten that! What would my death gain you?"

"Nothing at present, tonight," his voice cold and deliberate. "We naturally prefer to deal quietly with you, yet there are other methods available. It would not be impossible, I imagine, to even find a way into your hangar without discovery. You smile! We Germans study everything, Monsieur; we are patient, diligent. The guard—pah! it is less money than we

offer you for a guard, and, as for your own men, Ramon is a drunken fool, and De Vigne; there are ways of dealing with De Vigne. I tell you this that you may see just how you are situated. Not that I threaten—oh, no; but they know me in Europe for what I am—I do not fear the extreme measures, when all else fails."

He leaned back, his eyes looking frankly into mine, his shoulders squared. There was no doubt as to his exact meaning, his intentions. Something about the cold insolence of the man, coupled with memories of his reputation, caused me to shiver. He was like a wild beast on the trail, merciless, unyielding, hungry for the smell of blood. And I recognized now he possessed the power; he had played his cards well.

"Possibly, Herr Brandt," I suggested at last, holding myself firm, "you may have overlooked Mademoiselle Probyn."

"No harm will be done her, except a slight detention. We are not interested in any story she might care to tell afterwards. Whatever her suspicions, she knows practically nothing."

"True; yet she must have friends to be alarmed at her absence."

He laughed.

"Which remark serves us rather than yourself. 'T was a point I had overlooked. Fritz, come here." Franzen appeared so suddenly that I comprehended he had been on guard in the hall without. "Is not Monsieur's room ready yet? No; it should have been prepared before we came. Keep watch here a moment while I telephone."

He crossed the room, disappearing into an alcove at my left, while the newcomer leaned watchfully in the doorway. I heard the click of the receiver as it was taken down.

"Give me Main 782—yes, the *Press* office; hallo, is this the *Press* editorial rooms?—can you connect me with the City-editor's desk? Yes, it is important—thank you. Who is it speaking? All right, Schmitt; I recognize the voice now—this is Brandt—never mind where I am—the less you know the better—yes, everything is all right—what I called you up for is this, if anyone inquires for your young lady reporter just tell them she is on an assignment out of town, will you—may be gone a week. Never mind the reason; you do as I say. Oh, she 's safe

enough, but there might be friends who would inquire. Yes, that is all—good-by."

He sauntered carelessly back into the room, whistling softly.

"A ghost easily laid," he said, "and do you still require time in which to consider, Monsieur?"

"No; you already have my answer."

"They say the English are obstinate, but commend me to a Frenchman. However a few hours may work wonders, and meanwhile I have other strings to my bow. Is the room ready, Swigert?"

"Yes," answered the man stolidly in German, his face showing in the open door beside Franzen, "I have it ready."

Brandt bowed to me in mock politeness, his hand over his heart.

"A night's rest, Monsieur, together with an hour devoted to thought in the morning may be sufficient to show you the error of your ways. If not," and I felt the sudden grip of his fingers on my arm, "I will have to convince you by sterner measures. Come."

There was nothing to do but obey, faced as I

was by the three of them, all probably armed. However they might fear to use their weapons elsewhere, all danger of alarm was now nullified by the thick walls, and isolated situation of this house. With Swigert leading the way, and Brandt and Franzen close at my heels, I proceeded into the dimly lighted hall. The caretaker turned to the left, his footsteps noiseless on the soft carpeting, and then descended a stairway into the basement. A single small electric bulb gave me glimpses of the surroundings. It was all cement, even to the dividing walls, to the right open, merging into darkness forward, while on the other hand were rooms of different sizes, arranged conveniently for household use. The first was evidently the laundry, as I caught glimpse of stationary tubs; the second held a riff-raff of discarded furniture, and at the door of the third my guide stopped, motioning me to enter. The door, which to my surprise was of iron, opened outwardly and was made to be secured by a heavy bar. Within I saw a bare cot and single stool, the walls solid and unbroken, save for a small round opening directly opposite. I turned inquiringly to Brandt.

"Rather a neat arrangement," he commented dryly. "Absolute quiet assured. Tradition has it that the owner's brother became insane from drink, and this room was originally prepared to keep him in until he recovered, thus avoiding an unpleasant notoriety. You will kindly enter, Monsieur."

His tone, the expression on his face, was a command, and I stepped over the threshold, still facing them.

"I believe there is nothing more we can do for your comfort," he went on, rather enjoying the situation. "There is running water in the corner; no luxuries, of course, but all that a soldier requires. If the bed is hard you may have more opportunity for thought. My offer remains twenty-five thousand, Monsieur, and a guard will remain without."

I did not answer, and he laughed, signaling Swigert to close the door. It swung into place with a clang, and I heard the bar forced down into its sockets. For an instant I stood motionless staring at the painted iron, half suspecting I was in a dream. Yet this stupor was but for the instant; strange as the events of the night were,

rapidly as they had occurred, it was impossible for me to ignore their reality. The warning of my superiors in France flashed across my brain; they had appreciated, as I had not, the desire of other nations to appropriate our secrets. Yet, even now, it was almost impossible for me to conceive that such ruthless tactics would be resorted to. This was the twentieth century, not the seventeenth, and the heart of a great city. Outside, almost within reach of my voice, was modern civilization—law, the police, the newspapers, the quiet home-life of millions. Yet here I was, a prisoner in a dungeon, as completely in Brandt's power as though a captive of the Middle Ages. I had read of such things in fiction, and laughed at their improbability. I had supposed the War Office, in their warning, had merely meant that I should beware of spies. To that end I had taken every ordinary precaution, bearing on my person no papers of value, and having the hangar guarded night and day. But I had never anticipated a situation like this. Keen as was the rivalry in aeronautics throughout Europe, it had never once occurred to me that my invention was of a great money value

to a rival nation, or that its representatives would resort to force to make me reveal the secret. But I knew now, and the shock of discovery was like a blow. Brandt was in deadly earnest, and had already gone too far to hesitate at going further. His were no idle threats, however smilingly uttered. His reputation convinced me of that, even if I had not read the truth in the face of the man. He had the name of resorting to desperate means, and more than one whispered story of his dealing in such matters, came hauntingly to memory. Some of these even hinted vaguely at murder, at mysterious disappearances, at actual robbery. In Paris some wag had nick-named him "the last resort." Then—then I was not only battling for honor, for the safe-guarding of a French secret—my very life was in peril.

I seemed to awaken anew at the thought, and my eyes, which had been staring, unseeing, at that iron door, glanced about over the gray walls of cement. I was trapped like a rat, but not yet hopeless, or despairing. This was no prison, but merely a refuge for a victim of alcoholism; strong as it appeared, secure as Brandt evi-

dently believed it to be, yet there might be a weakness somewhere to yield to ingenuity and patience. It was worth the try. I sought the round opening first; small as it was, far too small for my body to ever squeeze through; it was effectually blocked by boiler plate, through which small apertures had been pierced sufficient for the admittance of air. The plate itself was solidly set in the wall, imbedded in cement. Finding not even so much as a loosened corner at which I could pry, I began a slow testing of the wall, using the butt of my unloaded revolver with which to sound. There was brick beneath the coating of cement, a hard, glazed brick, as I discovered by painfully gouging out a cracked bit in one corner, set solidly in mortar, so hard it turned my knife-blade. I dared not venture striking with any force, but with ear against the wall, convinced myself that it was both solid and thick. I made the circuit of the room twice, testing it every foot or two, without reward. No hollow sound disclosed any weakness. For the first time I despaired, and sat down upon the couch, not knowing what else to attempt.

No sound reached me through those thick

walls, and if, as Brandt had intimated, a guard remained on duty in the basement, the fellow possessed no means of observing my movements within. The door was a solid piece of iron, and, while it might be possible for one outside to use the small holes pierced in the grating over the window, I felt confident I was not being spied upon. Beyond doubt my captors were thoroughly convinced that the cell in which I was confined was absolutely safe. But I was far too restless to remain quiet; too desperate to yield without further effort. Even as my mind reviewed the night's adventures, and speculated on what Brandt might attempt now he had me safely under lock and key, my eyes were anxiously studying ceiling, side walls and floor. Apparently these offered nothing of weakness, yet, as a last resort, I pushed aside the cot—high enough to have been originally some surgeon's operating table—and made a more careful scrutiny of the wall space behind. The eye found nothing, as the bed shadow somewhat obscured the cement surface, but my fingers, by mere chance, touched a raveled edge of cloth. The raveling was so small that, for a moment

I esteemed it merely a thread accidentally bedded in the cement, yet some instinct led me to attempt digging it out with the point of my knife. This probing uncovered a section of coarse cloth, and, eagerly enough now, I clipped it sufficiently free so as to enable me to obtain a firm grip upon it. The result was astounding. The stout cloth held in my hands, ripping upward and across, showering broken cement on the floor, and revealing an opening nearly three feet in diameter, closed with wood. The meaning of it all occurred to me in a flash; there had been a dumb waiter here at some time; doubtless by means of it the poor devil confined had been fed. Later the opening had been closed, and boarded up, while, in order that the wall should look alike, cloth had been tacked across to retain the cement. This bit of falsework, unknown to the care-taker, Swigert, had also escaped the observation of Brandt. Without wasting time in further speculation I began my endeavors to loosen the boards.

CHAPTER IX

"STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE"

FORTUNATELY the wood was pine, and not thick, but even then I must have consumed twenty minutes in whittling out a space sufficiently long and wide to admit the muzzle of my revolver. This, however, afforded me ample purchase, and the nails yielded almost noiselessly. The first loosened board was utilized as a lever on its mates, and shortly gave me ample space in which to explore. A very brief groping in the dark hole proved my first conjecture correct. Not only had this been the passage for a dumb waiter from some upper floor, but the waiter itself had been left there, resting on the stone foundation. I felt upward as far as possible, discovering the contrivance had no cover, except iron braces to which a rope had been fastened. I could even feel the frayed end of a knot, but was unable to reach far enough to determine if the rope itself remained

intact. If not, or if it proved insecurely fastened at the upper end, my discovery was likely to be valueless, as the walls of the passage were of matched wood, smooth from long usage. To scale the shaft unaided would be impossible.

To get inside was not so difficult, but it required persistence and labor to discover a passage, through the iron network above. I wiggled and squeezed my way up at last, but confident I could never get back unaided, and, with beating heart, tested the strand of rope. It held; even to my heaviest pulling it appeared firmly attached somewhere above in the intense darkness. I hung upon it with my full weight, but there was no yielding to the strain. Thankful for a gymnastic training which made such a feat possible, I went up slowly, hand over hand. I could see nothing, but must have made fifteen or eighteen feet, when my groping hand encountered the upper beam. Wrapping the rope about my leg in partial support I explored my surroundings by sense of touch. The rope's end was wrapped about the beam and tied, a loop dangling. I crept into this, assured of its support, and began to feel for some opening in the

side wall. There must be one, unless it also had been sealed, which would be improbable, yet so closely did the slide fit, that I must have passed over it a dozen times before my fingers detected the crack. Only that I had determined upon which side it must be, and persevered in the search, I should have failed in uncovering it. Once found, however, and pried with my knife blade the door slid aside easily enough, but revealed nothing except darkness beyond.

There was no light, no noise, and, encouraged by this, I managed to swing my loop close enough so as to reach in through the opening, and gain grip on the edge of a shelf. This enabled me to drag my body slowly forward, although the narrowness of the opening caused discomfort, until I kicked the loop free, and let myself down gently on the floor. It was uncarpeted, and in the darkness, I felt the outlines of a gas range, and knew I was in a kitchen. Fearful of making some noise I moved with caution, discovering a window, with blinds tightly closed, and a large table, with some odds and ends upon it, including two empty cans, and finally came to a door, latched but unlocked.

This I opened noiselessly, an inch at a time, and peered out into the hall. Far in the distance to my left was a faint glimmer of light, barely visible. Even this dim illumination, to my eyes, trained by groping through the dark, rendered much visible, although distorted and grotesque. In a vague way I knew where I was, on the first floor, at the back of the house, and felt convinced the light must stream forth from the same room into which I had been first taken. Possibly Brandt had returned there, or Franzen. In either case it would be best for me to avoid that portion of the house.

My sole thought was of escape; of getting safely away, and warning my men at the hangar. I might be already too late, but every wasted second added to the danger. I could only guess at Brandt's plans, whether he had faith enough in my final yielding to refrain from other measures, or whether he would venture at once to win his end by force. He had my keys, and, so far as I knew, there was nothing to prevent his entering the hangar, except the faithfulness of De Vigne. Ramon had already yielded to weakness, and, if Eisenbarth's report was true as

overheard, one, at least, of the Pinkerton watch, had been easily bought. If it was his turn for duty, the conspirators should find easy sailing and small danger with only one man to oppose them, and he, doubtless, unsuspecting of their purpose. This situation obscured all else to my mind. It was not that I valued my discovery so highly; in very truth I considered the price offered in excess of its real importance; I could have laughed at the Germans for paying so highly for so simple an invention; but that was not the point. I was a French officer, intrusted by my government with a military secret, even warned to guard it with my life. I was here under orders which involved what I valued more highly than all else—my honor. I was pledged to preserve the unknown element in the Dessaud monoplane from others. This was the single thought which for the moment obsessed me, making me forgetful even of the girl also a prisoner, and for my sake.

I am ashamed now of the selfishness which actuated me, but tell the story as it occurred. My one dominant purpose was to escape, and overthrow Brandt's plans. I crept to the right, away

from the light, testing windows and doors, only to discover the former boarded up, the latter securely locked and keyless. They could not be forced open noiselessly, and to attempt such a thing would bring the whole pack upon me. Apparently the only way out was through the area door by which we had entered. As I stood there again in the hall, hesitating and doubtful I heard the chug of the motor outside, the sound growing fainter. Someone had left the house —Brandt probably—or else the chauffeur had been dispatched upon an urgent errand. At least there would be one less on guard. Heartened by this knowledge, and driven to action by the thought that at any moment that cell in the basement might be invaded, and my disappearance discovered, I crept forward toward the single gleam of light. To attain the opening I must pass this, and braced myself for the ordeal. The carpeted hall rendered my approach noiseless, while I could see well enough to avoid the few articles of furniture. To my left were broad stairs leading upward; to the right the lighted room with door ajar, and beyond the passage to the area.

Breathless I glanced into the illumined apartment, perceiving no evidence that it was occupied. I could see the table, and two-thirds of the room, and, encouraged, advanced a step further so as to survey every nook and cranny. There was no one there, unless hidden by the folds of drapery which concealed the alcove. There was no noise in the house, the silence profound, and I slipped through the door, and drew aside the curtain; the alcove was also vacant. There was no doubt in my mind now as to what had occurred. Satisfied that I was helplessly sealed in the cell below, both Brandt and Franzen had departed, leaving Swigert alone on watch. They did not purpose being absent long, or this light would have been extinguished, but for the moment I was free, with nothing to fear. I was standing there still, one hand grasping the portière draperies, when I heard a voice in the hall. Instantly I sprang back behind the folds, crouching low, yet able to peer out through the slit of the curtain. Franzen and Swigert entered, the latter with an automatic rifle in his hands, which he leaned against the wall. Franzen stretched himself on the sofa, smoking, and

it was clear enough that both men had been drinking.

"That was good stuff, Carl, and plenty more of it, you say?" he ejaculated in German. "No; not now. Brandt would raise hades if he knew about it, and he might jump back here any minute. I know where I get butter for my bread."

"Where 's he gone, anyhow?"

"Search me. All he said was, 'Stay here, and keep awake; I 'll be back later.' That 's his way; he never tells his plans. Obey orders, draw your pay, and let him do the thinking. I 've been with him five years now, and have got through asking questions. It 's no use, an' only gets him down on you. By God, I 'd kill a man now, if he said so, and never ask the reason; I 'd know it would be all right."

"That fellow is n't dead, is he?" and there was a certain accent of horror in Swigert's voice.

"Of course not; dead drunk is all. No need of killing that kind—brandy will do the business easier. But the Captain ain't afraid of the other way, when it is necessary. He 's as cold and hard as a rock. There 's the only man I was ever

afraid of in my life, Swigert; that 's a fact. If ever I went back on him he 'd break out of hell to kill me. I know it, and ain't taking any chances." He glanced about uneasily. "You better go back on guard."

"Oh, what's the use? The fellow is safe enough in there, and the Captain can't get back without our hearing the car. He 's the same Brandt that used to be in the Fifth Huzzars, is he?"

"Yes—Captain; the story is—that was all before my time—he was dismissed the service for killing a Major over a card game. I 've heard there was a woman involved, and a dirty scandal. Anyhow he dropped out of sight for a while, and then, all of a sudden, made his reappearance in the secret service. I 've heard the Kaiser took his part. Anyhow the war office gave him plenty of work. He served a year in the French army, and there 's some awful hard stories about what he 's done. First time I saw him was in Hungary five years ago, and I 've been with him, off and on, ever since. There is n't anything he 's afraid to do, under orders. He knows how to get results."

"Schmitt got me into this; he knows him."

"Yes, Brandt told me they were in the army together; funny little devil; scared half to death."

"Well, I ain't any too easy being mixed up in the affair myself. It 's all right for you fellows, able to leave the country, and keep out of sight, but we 're running some risk if this Frenchman ever gets out and squeals."

"You 're getting paid for it—more money than you have earned in a year—and this won't be the first Parley-voo you 've handled."

" 'T ain't because I care about that fellow, but I got to live here; I 'm an American citizen, and don't want to get into any trouble. What 's Brandt going to do with him?"

Franzen shook his head.

"That depends on what the fellow does for Brandt. But you have n't any cause to worry —the Captain knows what he is about."

"Maybe he does. Of course I know he is smart, but the best of them makes mistakes. There 's that girl now; he 's going to have a time of it keeping her still."

Franzen sat up suddenly, eyes snapping.

"I 'd forgotten her. There 'll be no danger of her wanting to talk when she does get out. We 've learned how to keep a woman quiet. Mighty pretty girl—this one—hey?"

"I did n't get to see her," admitted Swigert regretfully.

"I did; she was with the Frenchman at the café. Now Carl, you take my advice and go back on guard. I know the Captain, and he won't have any mercy if he ever catches you up here."

The care-taker picked up his gun, but loitered at the door.

"I 'll take a bottle with me then; it 's mighty lonesome down there."

"I don't care what you take, so you keep sober enough to escape the notice of Brandt. Bring me one here first, will you; I 've got to keep awake."

I could hear Swigert pass behind me along the hall, while Franzen stretched himself back on the sofa, and waited. I straightened up, but made no noise; somewhere out of sight, I heard a clock tick. Then the care-taker returned, and placed a pint bottle on the table. Franzen, lying

with hands beneath his head, staring up at the ceiling, paid no apparent attention.

"There 's your stuff," the other said shortly. "Where did Brandt go? do you know?"

"He did n't tell me, but maybe I could guess if I had to. It 's my idea he 's after the fellow's valises. The best thing you can do will be to get back down stairs."

"All right; I 'm going."

He disappeared, and, after listening for a moment to make certain he was alone, Franzen stepped across to the table, and poured himself out a stiff drink. He stood there muttering to himself in German, and then indulged in another, finally concealing the bottle behind some bric-a-brac on the mantle. The liquor did not seem to greatly affect him, for he paced the room twice steadily enough, although his face was flushed, and he muttered to himself; this was in German, and so indistinct I could barely distinguish isolated words.

"An hour yet—not two o'clock—pretty—bah! What do I care—free enough with others—picked up Dessaud—might try my luck too—afraid? I guess not—I can shut her mouth

—and his too, if it comes to that—won't do any harm to see."

He glanced out into the hall, turning his face so as to look both ways; then advanced to the head of the basement stairs. By stepping forward slightly I could see that far, and watched him lean over the railing and listen for some sound of Swigert below. Apparently satisfied he turned away, and disappeared to the left. Where he was going and what was his purpose, I could only conjecture, yet his vague mutterings had given me a clue—they must refer to Mademoiselle Probyn. I had not forgotten her presence, but rather she had been forced out of my mind by the importance of my own peril. I had not before conceived that she was also in danger. But now the situation assumed a totally different aspect. If Franzen in liquor sought her, taking advantage of Brandt's absence, my escape from the house became of secondary importance. Whatever might have brought her into this serious predicament—whether zeal as a newspaper woman, or personal interest in me —made no difference. She was a woman, a most charming woman, as I was ready to admit, and

I could never leave her unprotected to the scant mercy of such a wretch as Franzen. What the latter might do or attempt, I could only conjecture, yet I felt the fellow was sufficiently under the influence of liquor to be dangerous. All this flashed over me in an instant, as I realized he had vanished in the direction of the flight of stairs leading to the upper floor.

I crept to the door, and looked out cautiously. Franzen was just disappearing around the baluster above, a dim moving figure. He seemed to pause, and I quickly drew back, convinced that he was leaning over the rail, staring down, to make certain he was unobserved—that Swigert remained on duty in the basement. His cat-like caution, and watchfulness, convinced me afresh his purpose must be an evil one. In the full glow of the light I dare not move, until my ears, strained to the utmost, told me he had changed his position, was feeling his way slowly along the upper hall. Then I slipped forth silently, almost holding my breath, and stole up the carpeted steps, pressing close against the darker shadow of the wall. The night hung black enough at the top, and the passageway was

so strange to me that I was compelled to grope my way forward. Franzen had turned toward the front of the house, and I took the same direction, barely avoiding a couch against the side-wall, and feeling out a passage inch by inch. Twice I stopped to listen, but met with no reward. Then I came to a sharp corner, the hall turning abruptly to the left, revealing a light streaming through a narrow transom. Even as I caught its reflection the door opened suddenly, and a man's figure disappeared within. I thought I distinguished a startled exclamation, but the door closed so quickly as to shut it off unrecognized. I ran forward, then stopped, striving to distinguish what was occurring behind that barrier.

CHAPTER X

MISS PROBYN DEFIES DANGER

THE key was outside in the lock, proof enough that Franzen realized the need of haste, and had wasted no time in attaining entrance. Once within he felt capable of preventing any escape, and he had no fear of being followed. The transom was closed, but, with ear held close to the wood, I could distinguish voices, and even pick out fragments of speech. Trusting they were both too excited to be observant I ventured to remove the key, dropping it into my pocket, and staring through the aperture. I could perceive quite a section of the room, and their words reached me now clearly.

She stood facing him fully dressed, but with the loose coat discarded and flung over the foot of the bed, the coverlet of which appeared ruffled, as though she had been lying down, perhaps sleeping. If so she was certainly wide awake

enough now, judging from the flash of her eyes, and glow of color in her cheeks. For the first time I realized her beauty, or else suddenly perceived it with new eyes—the rounded firmness of chin, the red fullness of lips, the shapely nose, so expressive of character, the deep, earnest eyes, that could laugh so easily, or glow with indignation, the long lashes, and the broad forehead shadowed by a mass of hair. It was a witching face, piquant, ever changing in expression, yet reflecting strength of purpose, and purity of thought.

"Then why are you here?" she asked, as if repeating the question. "You have not answered me. The outrage of holding me a prisoner is surely enough, without the indignity of this insult."

"Oh come now, don't be afraid."

"Afraid!" scornfully, "I am not afraid—not of you. I might be of your master, but I 've met enough of your kind to recognize the breed."

"You think so!" his voice proving she had angered him, inflamed his passion. "Well, you better be more pleasant about it, or you may discover your mistake. Mind that, Miss, for

there is no one in this house to help you if I took a whim to be ugly. Do you know who I am?"

"The jailor probably; one of Brandt's hired men. Yes, I know you—you were at the café, and took part in that fake fight. But I do not in the least care who you are. I want to know what you are doing in this room?"

Franzen took a step aside, so as to get beyond the barrier of a small table, giving me a glimpse of his face. It was red with liquor, and his eyes were ugly. Whatever he might have expected, this reception was not quite to his liking, and he was already in quarrelsome mood. She never moved from her position, her eyes on his face, one hand held behind her.

"You remain where you are," she said quietly, "unless you care to get hurt."

"To hell with your threats; Brandt searched you, I saw him. Now look here, my lady, there 's no use fighting," and he held out his hands. "I 'm stronger than three of you, and could crush the life out of you if I took the notion. I 'm the boss here, and you are a blamed fool if you make me mad."

"Where is Captain Brandt?"

He chuckled grimly.

"He 's gone; that 's enough for you to know, and I 'm in charge here. What 's the use of your being so ugly about it? Maybe I ain't as damned handsome as that Frenchman you 're running after, but I 'm just as much of a man."

"What do you mean?" her face flaming. "That I have been seeking Monsieur Dessaud?"

"Good Lord! have n't you? Is n't that what brought you into this fix?"

"No!" and I could see her form straighten. "Now pay attention to me, Franzen, and let this affair end. I am not the kind of a woman for such an insult; I am not in that class. If you have come here tonight under that impression you better go away at once. I do not threaten, but I warn you that if you venture to so much as lay hand on me, I 'll kill you. I mean that! So you thought I was running after Lieutenant Dessaud, did you? That was why you dared unlock this door, and force your way in here? You are the very kind of cur to put that construction on it—"

"Maybe I 'll teach you yet," he broke in fiercely, "to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"You can never teach me not to despise your kind," she went on stoutly. "And first you 'll learn that I am not afraid of you. You are a coward, Franzen, a sneaking coward. The only thing that has given you courage enough to come up here is whiskey. Don't deny; I can smell the stuff from here. Whiskey courage never made any hit with me. Now, listen; I am not your kind of a woman. Probably you are not even acquainted with my kind, but you are going to discover something new tonight. Do you know how I chanced to be in Lieutenant Dessaud's company last evening?"

"Sure I do—you picked him up on the street."

"And therefore you jumped to conclusions. Well, as it happens, there is more to the story than that. I do not in the least care what you think; nevertheless I am going to tell you the circumstances. I am a newspaper woman, a reporter on the *Press*. I am under orders just as a soldier is, and must go where I am told. The assignments given me are not always pleasant ones but I have no choice in the matter. My city editor decides that. Do you understand? One can still remain a true woman in the news-

paper life—respecting herself, and respected by others—and yet be no prude, or slave to the conventions. She must obey orders."

He nodded sullenly, without moving.

"Very well; I was sent out by my city editor to interview Lieutenant Dessaud. Others had failed, and I was given specific instructions how to succeed. The task was not a pleasant one; it involved deceit; for the time at least, it placed me in a false position. If he had not been a gentleman it might have proven most embarrassing. However the moment I looked into his face I knew I was safe. Moreover that same moment I became his friend, anxious to be of service."

She stopped, breathing swiftly, waiting for him to speak, but the man remained silent.

"I took this assignment exactly as I would any other. There were circumstances connected with it that seemed peculiar—my instructions relative to taking the Lieutenant to the Café François, for instance, and the methods I should use to gain his interest—yet the newspaper game is played in so many ways, that one is not easily alarmed, and—it was my duty to obey orders as in any ordinary case."

She clasped her hands in sudden gesture, and Franzen laughed.

"That 's where you gave yourself away, my beauty."

"I! Explain yourself!"

"That hand you held behind you all the time; I thought, maybe, you retained a gun Brandt had n't found."

"Oh, so that was the cause of your politeness."

"Partly; for I don't care nothing about your story—why should I?" his tone growing rougher, now he was again assured of her helplessness. "Besides I have n't got time to hear it. That 's all you 're telling it for—hoping someone will come up, and help you. Well, let me tell you, Miss, plain; there ain't no one to come. The care-taker and I are the only ones in the house, and he 's down in the basement guarding the Frenchman. You could scream your head off, and never be heard."

"Do you threaten to attack me?"

"I don't see no reason. You have n't fooled me any by what you 've said. Of course I know you are a reporter on the *Press,* but it 's my notion old Schmitt never would have picked you

out for this job if he had n't sized you up right. You met the Frenchman on the street, did n't you, and then went to dinner with him? Then you steered him down to François, which is n't exactly the place for a little Sunday school girl. Come on, now, don't pretend to be so awfully nice, and exclusive. I don't want any rough house, but you can't throw any more dust in my eyes."

"You pretend that my explanation is false?"

"Oh, you 're not such a wonder, as to hold me at arm's length. Come on, now; I 'm no fool, and don't propose being treated like one."

He stepped forward, and she drew back toward the farther wall. She was not afraid of him, I could see that, for the expression on her face was disgust and indignation, yet she was unarmed, while I was certain Franzen had a revolver concealed somewhere.

"No!" she said clearly. "No; you shall not touch me."

She slipped about the table, and he followed her blindly, so assured of his final victory as to become careless. With a swift movement she attained the door and grasped the knob. The

same instant the fellow, uttering an oath, gripped her sleeve, hurling her to one knee. But, even as she fell, she flung open the door, and I leaped through into the room. Her body was in the way, permitting Franzen to straighten up before I could reach him. Even then my one controlling thought was to prevent his shooting. The fellow was about my size and strength, yet my only fear was of his weapon. If I could keep him from drawing that I felt confident of the result of the struggle. So astonished was he by my unexpected appearance that I had my grip before he could spring aside, or make any effort at escape. In an instant we were locked in each other's arms, crunched tightly together, and swaying back and forth in mad effort at mastery —he striving to break free, and I to hold him helpless. His very cowardice made him fiendish when once trapped, and those first fierce moments of struggle brought to me a sensation of defeat. He fought with tooth and nail, exhibiting a strength I had not supposed he possessed, while the drink in him gave an insane cunning. In spite of all I could do I was hurled back against the table, which crashed to the floor bear-

ing us both with it. Yet no effort on his part loosened my grip, not even then, although like a savage dog, he buried his teeth in my shoulder. The pain infuriated me, and I managed to retaliate by planting a knee in his stomach, loosening the grip of his jaws by driving my head against his chin.

Except that he swore once in German neither uttered a sound, but he possessed the advantage of knowing I was unarmed. Assured of this he worked one arm free, and struck me again and again, forcing my head back until I was obliged to release my hold in self-defense. Instantly the fellow was upon his feet, tugging at his revolver, a malicious grin on his face. With all my force I flung myself head first forward, striking him like a catapult, with the full weight of my body. He went over, crashing against the window ledge, and dropped limp on the floor, the weapon flying from his hand undischarged. Without waiting to see the result, half dazed myself by the violence of the blow struck, I crept across, and secured it; then struggled to my feet, reeling dizzily from pain, everything blurred before me. The girl was erect, grasping the knob of the

He fought . . . exhibiting a strength I had not supposed he possessed

door, as though half inclined to flee, yet hesitating, and staring back at us both. I barely glanced toward her, gripping a chair to keep me erect, gazing at Franzen's motionless body through a purple haze. I could not determine that he did not move, and advanced slowly, the weapon held ready to cover him. Aware that she had moved toward me, I reached down and turned his head so that his white face was upward. As my fingers touched him I realized the man was dead.

CHAPTER XI

FRESH COMPLICATIONS

THE shock of this discovery left me speechless; I could only grope for the man's heart with merciless fingers. It did not seem possible that he could be actually dead. Yet the fact was beyond dispute. Half aware of her presence I looked up, and met her eyes.

"What is it? Tell me; has—has he been killed?"

"Yes," and I found strength to arise. "He—he must have struck the sharp casing of the window—see, his skull is crushed. I—I had no thought—"

"I know that," she interrupted quietly. "I saw how it happened: you could not have done otherwise. He deserved it all, but—but," her hands pressed to her face, "you do not realize what this means to us—to us both."

"What do you mean?"

"His death by—by violence. Every power

on earth will be invoked for vengeance. His government will demand, and compel, arrest and conviction. You do not understand; you do not even know who he was?"

"No, only that he was a tool employed by Brandt. I heard him boast below how long they had been together."

"They had—yes," she explained, "but he was not a tool, an employee. Brandt operated under his orders. He is connected with the legation at Washington. Schmitt told me that after we left the Café François—not what he was, not his office, but he is Baron von Franzen, and no mere spy to be shuffled out of sight and forgotten. His death will be investigated, probed, not with any attempt at justice, but in a determination to convict. It will be made a government matter, and your plea of self-defense laughed at."

"But you saw; you can testify."

"Do you suppose they would give me the chance! Monsieur, I have been an American newspaper woman too long not to know the methods. It will be revenge, not justice sought, and Brandt may be trusted to hush up the facts in the case. His success depends on secrecy,

and he will take no chance with the truth."

"That might be true—in Germany; but not here, in free America."

"No," scornfully; "you have a foreigner's dream of the impossible. The difference is not so great. This country is full of Germans, Monsieur, in every rank of life. They are good citizens, but there is a mystic tie connecting them with the Fatherland which no oath of allegiance to this country can wholly sever. Many of them have been soldiers, and, like Schmitt, still respond to the call of discipline. They are not unjust, but Germany means native land. Silent as such influence is, it is nevertheless marvelously strong. Nor is that all."

"You know more?"

"I know there is a network of spies in this country, as well as in Europe. Perhaps they are not so active, because there is less need; the jealousy between nations is not so acute. But Brandt knows who he can call upon in this city, if he needs help; there are many who will obey his orders, if he makes known his authority. Do you suppose he will hesitate to act when he learns of this man's death? He will never permit it

to be made public; he will revenge it himself."

"With my life, Mademoiselle?" I questioned, startled, but disbelieving. "That would be too dangerous; I am as well known, my government—"

"Would never know. There is no place like a great city in which to hide crime. I beg of you, Monsieur, do not treat my warning lightly. Remember what these men have dared do already—to us both. Why should they hesitate to venture still farther? You should know what the spy system of Europe is; men are not employed in it who are unwilling to risk their lives. It is no different here." She leaned toward me in eagerness, touching my arm. "I did not know all this until tonight, but you—you are a French officer, and have met foreign spies before—have n't you?"

"Yes," I admitted. "They are numerous enough across the water."

"And if less numerous here, no less dangerous. You even knew of Captain Brandt in Europe?"

"He had been described to me; some of his exploits."

"And do you suppose his ocean voyage across has greatly changed his nature?"

I shook my head, my glance turning from her to the dead face on the floor. Beyond doubt the girl was right; the affair was far more serious than I had at first conceived.

"But—but how does it happen you know all this?" I asked. "You have not lived abroad."

"No," promptly; "nor did I know until a few hours ago. I had read of such things to be sure; they are in books of romance, but I had supposed the incidents largely drawn from the novelist's imagination. Tonight I was brought face to face with the actual facts. I am a newspaper woman, Monsieur, and we see much that is strange in life. But this assignment was different; I suspected evil at once; I told you so, and warned you of danger. You admit that?"

"Yes."

"Yet even then I did not realize how far those men might go—the nature of their plot. What occurred at the Café François was as great a surprise to me as to you. But afterward, when they had taken you away unconscious, I could not rest without learning more. I thought you

would deem me an accomplice; would believe I had lured you there treacherously—"

"I did not," I protested warmly. "I held you innocent."

"I hoped you might, but could not have blamed had it been otherwise. It all occurred so swiftly, so surprisingly, that I was helpless. Before I comprehended the plan, you had been spirited away, and I was there alone, with Schmitt grasping my arm. A small crowd gathered asking questions, and a policeman hurried up. Schmitt was anxious to get away, and I made no resistance for it would have been useless. I knew nothing of where you had been taken, and my first thought was to make Schmitt tell. He got a cab, and took me to my home. I talked to him on the way, carelessly, as though I took the evening's adventure as a joke. This deceived him, and, as I already knew so much, he explained Brandt's purpose. I think he told me all he knew, for his idea was they merely intended to gain possession of your papers, and then let you go. He explained about the spy system, and how he had been drawn into the affair. He was frightened, and begged me to remain at home

until sent for. I promised, and he left me there."

I did not speak, and her lowered eyes again sought mine questioningly.

"I did not feel bound by such a promise, Monsieur," she went on firmly. "I had betrayed you, and knew I must make amends. Monsieur, I did not believe all that he said; if those men would strike you down thus in a public place, there was nothing too desperate for them to attempt when they once had you in their power. I could not rest, or refuse to help. I did not know where they had taken you, but Schmitt gave me a hint, and I found them. It was only when you came out of the hotel that I was sure. What happened after that you know. I—I tried to do what was right, but—but now the horror of it all," and she pointed at Franzen, drawing her skirts closer.

"You did do what was right," I exclaimed, "and not one in a thousand would have been brave enough to venture it. You are afraid I may think you unwomanly?"

She shot a quick glance into my eyes, the color flooding her face.

"You surely have every reason to doubt me."

"I confess to none, Mademoiselle; I recognize none. I am not ungrateful."

"Oh, I would not care for that! Gratitude! Why I have barely done my duty. Let us not talk of gratitude, for, in truth, I have caused you all this trouble. But for me you would never have fallen into the hands of these men; but for me this horrible affair could not have happened. I am the cause of it all; you—you killed this man to protect me from insult."

"I sought to protect you—yes, but the death was an accident."

She gave a swift gesture of impatience.

"Accident or not, Lieutenant Dessaud, I insist that you treat this incident seriously. It is serious for both of us. Baron von Franzen has been killed; he met death at your hands, and your only hope of escape from being charged with his murder is to leave Chicago at once, is to get out of the clutches of these men."

"But surely the law would protect me from injustice."

"The law!" for the first time she laughed as she had earlier in the evening. "What can the

law have to do with the case? Has the law prevented your being held prisoner and robbed? Has the law saved me the humiliation of being here?" She glanced about at the walls of the room. "You have escaped from the cell in which you were confined, but we are still in this unknown house under guard—prisoners in Brandt's power. He is the one to fear, not only now, while we remain in his hands, but also his influence outside. Have you any idea where he has gone? How long he will be away?"

"I heard Franzen say he was attempting to secure my valises from the hotel."

"The Congress?"

"Yes."

"You signed no order? Then he would be compelled to forge one. No; perhaps not; he took your keys? Was the room key among them?"

I felt hastily through my pockets.

"I am not sure," I answered in doubt. "My garments were all searched while I was unconscious, but later Brandt returned what had been taken. The room key is not here, but I may not have had it with me."

She stood quiet thinking, a little wrinkle between her eyes. Her glance sank to the body on the floor, and she gave a slight shudder, turning away.

"That makes little difference," she admitted slowly. "For the man would discover some means for achieving his purpose. Tell me what you know about this house; how you came to be here."

I related the story swiftly, and she listened without comment until I had finished.

"You, of course, have no knowledge of where we are? What part of the city?"

"I thought I recognized Michigan Avenue, and when we turned it was to the left."

"The South Side—in the neighborhood of the lake shore. I thought so, although I was brought here with curtains tightly drawn. Then, if you are right, Monsieur, only one of the gang is left in the house—the man Swigert?"

"Yes."

"And he is on guard in the basement."

"He was. I will creep down now, and discover if the passage is clear."

"No," and she caught my arm. "We will go

together. I—I could not remain here alone."

At the door she drew her breath sharply, glancing back into the lighted room.

"Shall we leave him lying there just—just as he is?" she asked, her lips quivering. "It seems heathenish."

"We have ourselves to consider, not Franzen," I returned not unkindly, but fully aroused now to the situation, and drawing her with me out into the hall. "It can make no difference to him where he lies. Come, Mademoiselle."

I closed the door silently, feeling her press more closely to me in the sudden darkness. For a moment we stood there listening, but nothing broke the intense stillness, except our own breathing. Once she shuddered, and I heard a half suppressed sob.

"Do not break down," I whispered, almost tenderly. "Surely, there is nothing so terrible to fear."

"It is not that; I am not afraid, but—but the sight of that dead man, being there beside him so long, has unnerved me," she explained. "I will be all right when—when we start to do something."

"Then let us feel our way to the head of the stairs; there is a light burning below."

"Must we go that way? In a house like this there must be a servant's staircase."

"I remember none, and if there is it could be of little service. I told you the rear door was locked, and all the lower windows boarded up. The front entrance, under the area stairs, is the only one unfastened."

Her hand tightened on mine, but she made no further remonstrance, and I moved forward, feeling my way cautiously along the wall. Had I been alone I should have walked out boldly enough, paying small heed to Swigert, for Franzen's loaded revolver rested in my pocket, but her presence was a restraint. For all I knew Brandt might have returned, and it was to our interest to avoid creating alarm. If that one door was our sole means of escape the more quietly we could attain it the better. Scarcely realizing that I retained her hand closely clasped in mine, I stole down the stairs toward the dim reflection of light below. We had reached the foot when we heard the chug of the automobile, and came to a sudden pause, staring into each

other's eyes. The frightened look in her face served to steady me.

"We 're too late; there is no time to bolt," I muttered shortly. "Quick—let 's try this room until he goes by."

I flung open the door and thrust her into the dense darkness, crouching beside her, and noiselessly fastening the latch. Almost with the closing of the door we heard Brandt and the chauffeur at the head of the area stairs, the former calling for Franzen, as he peered into the lighted room opposite.

"Not here," he exclaimed. "Wait there where you are, Eisenbarth; he 's probably down in the basement."

The thick hall carpet rendered footsteps noiseless, but a moment later his voice sounded again as he called:

"Below there."

"Hullo."

"That you, Swigert? What has become of Franzen?"

"He was there in the back-parlor the last I knew, sir. He 'll be around there somewhere all right."

"Crawled off and gone to sleep," put in Eisenbarth. "I 'm tired enough myself."

"Then we 'll wake him up," growled the leader. "How 's the prisoner?"

"Could n't be quieter if he was dead," returned the voice below. "Was about half asleep myself when you came in."

For a moment they all appeared quiet; then the chauffeur spoke.

"No use hunting him in there, sir; that 's where we put the stiff."

"That 's right; let 's try the other rooms. Give me some matches, will you; it is too risky switching on the lights."

I drew the girl back behind the door, where we would be partially sheltered from observation. Without realizing I was doing so, or rather thinking nothing of the action in the excitement, I kept a grasp on her hands, and held her closely to me.

"Do not move," I whispered. "They may not discover us here, even if they come in."

The returning pressure of her fingers answered; I could feel the warmth of her body, hear her suppressed breathing. Outside, a

match flared as it was scratched against wood, but no hand touched the knob of our door. It seemed to me the men were groping their way along the back hall. Finally Eisenbarth spoke again, his voice sounding some distance away:

"He is n't here, that 's certain. Where did you put the girl?"

"Up above; you don't suppose—"

"Why not? That is his reputation, and she was a peach, what little I saw of her. If that is where he is we better let him alone."

Brandt laughed.

"I never thought of that," he admitted. "Oh, I 'll let him alone on that proposition, never fear. Best thing that could happen to keep her tongue still. Just creep up the stairs and see if there is a light burning."

There followed a few moments of silence; then the voices again, this time directly before our door.

"There is a light, all right, Captain, in the front room, but I could n't hear any noise."

The other chuckled, as though it was all a good joke.

"So much the better for Franzen. He 'll

show up presently. Meanwhile I am hungry enough to eat; Swigert."

"Yes, sir."

"There is nothing to remain down there for. Come up, and see what kind of a lunch you can spread. Any liquor in the house?"

The footsteps of the care-taker sounded plainly enough. I could even distinguish when he set his gun down against the wall.

"Plenty of that, but not so much to eat. Franzen had a bottle already."

"Which accounts for his courage—hey, Eisenbarth? Well, hustle up what you have, and bring in some whiskey."

We waited, pressed close together, listening, barely able to distinguish the faint sounds reaching us from without.

"What shall we do?" she whispered.

"I cannot decide yet," I answered. "There are three of them armed; we must wait for some chance to slip out."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE DEATH CHAMBER

WAITING there in the dark was hard work. I drew a bit away from her, changing my position as silently as possible, but she kept her clasp on my hand.

"Please do not leave me," she urged. "I—I actually believe I am afraid."

"This position is enough to make anyone nervous; it seems quiet out there; I thought I would see how it looked."

"Oh, don't venture yet! I can hear voices." She leaned forward. "What was it Captain Brandt meant when he laughed? Did he—did he actually believe I was with that man?"

"Undoubtedly; otherwise he would n't rest so easily now. It is, in fact, a good thing for us he did."

She gave a little sob.

"But why should he think that! Why should he speak—speak like that of me?" her voice

trembling even in its whisper. "Have I acted unwomanly?"

"You! Why it is nothing you have done at all, Mademoiselle. There are men who think evil of all women, because they are themselves evil. Do not permit that fellow's words to trouble you."

"But you heard what he said, and you have far more reason to doubt me than he. I have appeared under false colors, and acted as an accomplice to these conspirators. Brandt's sneer has caused me to realize, as I never have before, the depth of my degradation. You are kind, Monsieur, and you treat me with courtesy, yet down in your heart there can be no respect for any woman who would do what I have done."

Even in the darkness I felt the hand outstretched in despairing gesture, and held it firmly.

"I am sorry such a doubt has come to you," I said soberly, "for it is not true. I cannot speak here, for we are still in peril, and every moment is of value, but I hold nothing against you. This predicament in which we find ourselves is fate. You were but an unconscious instrument. So

far am I from blaming you that even now I feel thankful you were involved in the affair."

"Thankful! you mock me!"

"Oh, no; not in months, even years, of ordinary intercourse could I have come to know you as I do now. Had we ever met under other conditions I might have considered you a most commonplace person to be forgotten in an hour."

"But I am."

"Of that let me be judge; at least the forgetting will be impossible. Why should this not be true with me as well as with you. Can you forget?"

"No; I have no desire to do so; but with you it is different."

"Why, Mademoiselle? I am a man as you are a woman—the gulf between us is not so wide."

"Oh, but it is! You are a man of affairs, of the world, an officer of your nation, distinguished, honored, respected. You know the women of the capitols of Europe; while what am I? A mere newspaper scribbler, forced to do work of which I am ashamed. No! do not interrupt, for I wish you to realize that I understand the truth. I know what your class in Europe think of

women who write for the daily press. They are held as unsexed. Is that not so?"

"There is a prejudice—yes," I admitted. "I was not free from it myself, for those of the profession I have met in Paris were hardly of the sort to inspire respect. If I had met you ordinarily my European prejudice would have blinded me; I would never have comprehended the American difference."

"You think me an exception then?"

"An utter contradiction rather; although, of course, I am not capable of passing judgment on American newspaper women."

"They are of all kinds—good and evil mixed. The work is of a nature to develop whatever tendency is uppermost at the start. But I am not so deeply interested in your judgment of my profession, as of your present faith in me individually. It is Helen Probyn who is on trial."

"Not in my court," I answered earnestly, "for I have decided the issues already. I have forgotten all else of the case except that the defendant is a most charming woman."

"Which, even if true, can be no possible excuse for her actions, for the strange position in

which she now finds herself. Monsieur, I appreciate your gallantry, but I ask more—your faith in me as a woman."

"It is yours, Mademoiselle," I said simply, and lifted her hand to my lips. "Not as a courtier, but as a man I speak. I am your friend always. You believe me now?"

"Yes," the faintest hesitancy in the whispered word. "I must believe; it is in my heart to wish it so. I—I cannot tell you how deeply I have been humiliated by my position. I did not care at first, for when I started out to gain an interview with you it was apparently but a part of my ordinary routine. Please let me explain! I want you to know you were nothing to me then —a mere name, a foreign name, in which I was in no wise interested. Yet, when I met you, I realized it was different: I regretted the part I was cast to play. When we were at supper I was planning how to escape; but you would not let me. My story, half told, had aroused in you a spirit of adventure, and I dare not warn you of what I suspected, because it was merely suspicion. There was nothing left me, but to accompany you—was there?"

"No; that was my fault, not yours."

"It is generous of you to say so. What I wish you to understand is this—it was a mere newspaper reporter who met you at the Art Building; but it was a woman who sat beside you at the Café François; it is a woman who is here now. You know what I mean?"

"Fully—you have changed, because I am no longer a mere name, but an individual—a friend."

"Yes, a friend," softly, the word lingering on her lips. "That means much—sometimes. I have never had many friends; those to whom I could speak frankly. But we have met so strangely every barrier seems leveled. I scarcely recognize myself sitting here in the dark talking with you like this—as though I had known you always. It—it is not natural. Why should I care so much to retain your respect, your friendship? Yesterday I did not know your name."

"I am willing to let the mystery pass without explanation," I answered, my pulses leaping, "and rejoice in the acknowledgment. I want you for a friend, Mademoiselle, not merely in the darkness of tonight, but also in the glow of to-

morrow. Let me make my confession as well. It was merely an adventurer who met you last evening, but it is a man who speaks now. The change wrought by a few hours is not for you alone. Helen Probyn is no longer a mere name to me."

She did not speak, although I waited, listening to her quick breathing.

"Do you care?"

"Yes—of course I care," frankly, yet withdrawing her hand from mine, as though just realizing they were clasped together. "I value your friendship, and always shall. But how can we sit here talking of such things? We have forgotten where we are. I hear no noise outside; are those men still there?"

"Someone passed along the hall a moment ago, and voices spoke in the room opposite. Remain where you are till I explore this apartment; there may be some other way out."

I arose to my feet, but she grasped my sleeve.

"Let me go with you! the—the silence is on my nerves."

We moved forward cautiously, groping our way through the dark, fearful of making the

slightest noise to be heard without. Where Brandt, and his assistants might be, was only a matter of guess, and, at any moment, they might learn something to awaken suspicion, and cause them to commence search. With the loaded revolver in my pocket I was no longer greatly afraid of an encounter, in spite of the odds against me, yet the presence of the girl prevented my becoming reckless. Any revolver duel might attract intervention from without, and such public exposure would reflect upon her reputation. Innocent as her presence was, yet the tongue of the world would not spare her name, and I realized that we must depend upon our own efforts at escape. The clinging pressure of her fingers on my arm kept her constantly in my memory, and I was conscious of a tenderness toward her most unusual. She was no longer merely a woman I was bound to protect and shield, but the woman whose safety meant more than my own. My blood leaped at the slightest pressure of her form against mine, the confident clinging of her fingers. I, who for so long had been indifferent to the sex, awoke suddenly now —surprised and startled—to find myself a pris-

oner to this strange girl. I scarcely comprehended the truth, yet the net bound me, and my heart throbbed at her presence. Even then my one desire was to look into her eyes, and read their message; until I could do that I must crush back the mad words on my lips.

I touched chairs upholstered in leather; a table; book-cases, protected by glass; felt the outlines of a low window, protected by lace curtains, and with outside blinds fastened. Then we encountered a wide couch of soft plush resting against the wall. Convinced we were in the library I merely swept one hand over the plush to assure myself of its nature, but came in startled contact with a shoe, apparently encasing a human foot. Even in that first instant I recognized it to be the coarse, rough shoe of a workingman, caked with mud. What—in the name of God!—was such as he doing, lying there? Obeying my first impulse I drew her a step backward.

"Do not be frightened," I whispered, "but remain where you are; there is a man lying on the couch."

"A man! Are you sure?"

"Yes; I felt his foot. You will wait here quietly while I investigate? He cannot be asleep, for there is no sound of breathing."

"Oh! you—you think he is dead?"

"I suspect so at least, but must make certain."

She let me go, and I held the revolver in one hand as I crept back through the darkness. The man must be dead, and yet I dare not take the chance of arousing a sleeper. It was with a shrinking of horror I touched the motionless form, fingering gingerly coarse trousers, and a workman's shirt. Then my hand came in contact with flesh, cold, clammy. He was dead, and I straightened up, breathing more freely, and dropped the weapon back into my pocket. There was nothing to fear from him.

"He is dead, Mademoiselle," I said gravely, and with outstretched hand touched her again, knowing my nearness would help her to regain courage. "There is no danger."

"Dead! but who can it be?"

"I have no way of knowing, but from his clothes he must have been a laborer. I wonder if I dare strike a match?"

She did not answer, only I could feel her body

tremble, and knew she was staring through the dark in horror.

"I am going to risk it. There was no transom to that room opposite, and there probably is none here. I must see his face."

The match burst into flame silently, and the slight flare lit up the room dimly. I leaned forward, and held the blazing splinter closer. The man's face was to the wall, and I was compelled to bend far over to see his features. The match fluttered as I stared down, flickered and went out.

"Good God!" I muttered, staggering back, as though dealt a blow. "It 's Ramon."

"Who? Someone you know?"

"Yes, one of my men. I cannot be mistaken, but will strike another match and make sure."

The yellow flame rendered the dead face ghastly, but there was no doubt as to who the dead man was. With shaking hand still holding the burning stick I glanced up at her, the tiny glow of light rendering every expression visible. Then we were in darkness.

"Was it your man?"

"Yes; but I saw no wound. Still he could not

have died from natural cause, for he was well yesterday. Besides, why should he be here?"

There was silence between us; then she spoke, again clasping my arm, but with voice under control.

"There is but one explanation—only the one. We must face the truth. This is the work of those men. It is part of the conspiracy against you. It proves to what desperate means Brandt will resort to gain his ends. He will not hesitate even at murder."

"But I am not sure this is murder."

"Perhaps not; they may not have actually killed the man by violent means. But the result is the same. They have got to conceal his death, however it occurred. Rather than be discovered now, they would—would kill us. Why do you think he was not murdered?"

"From a bit of conversation overheard. Ramon drank heavily at times, and Brandt's spies discovered his weakness. One boasted of plying him with liquor, and, I believe, his death was the result. They gave him too much."

"Yes; yet the important fact is that he *is* dead," she insisted, "and they cannot permit it

to be known until they are safely away. Involved as they are now, they would do any desperate deed to escape discovery."

"You are afraid?"

"Yes, I am afraid," clinging to me, no longer making any attempt at concealing her real feelings. "But it is for you, as much as for myself. The danger which confronts us now is not Brandt alone, but also the law; we must hide from both."

"The law!"

"Ramon is not the only dead man in this horrible house, Monsieur. Have you forgotten von Franzen? The moment his body is discovered Brandt will be given the very weapon he needs against you."

"I see, Mademoiselle, and also a method by which he can escape. But would he dare call in the police?"

"Dare! Why not? What has he to fear from their investigation? He could prefer murder charges against you, substantiated by the testimony of his men; have me detained as witness, or accessory, and be perfectly free to obtain access to your machine before we could hope

for release on bond. There would be no one to oppose him, except the single employee you have left."

"True, but the trial?"

She laughed scornfully.

"The trial! Monsieur, why need there be a trial? This is America, and not Europe; we do things differently over here. I have known cases not dissimilar to die on court calendars, where sufficient influence was used to defeat justice. Why should it not be so in this case, after Brandt had secured all the information he desires, and has disappeared? The German Government could convict you, or turn you loose, whichever was desired. There are ways of doing these things."

The very earnestness with which she spoke convinced me this was all true. Moreover I was sufficiently posted on intrigue to comprehend how easily a rascal could carry forward such a scheme to success. The cards were every one in his hands; all he had to do was play them boldly. And Brandt would do that; everything I knew of the man proved he possessed the necessary daring. Besides he risked little in such a venture,

for he could vanish utterly, confident of being shielded by his government, while, even if the French Consul came at once to my assistance, and procured my release, the damage would already be accomplished. As all this rushed across my mind, it aroused thoroughly my fighting spirit. I had been through too much to lie down now, and confess defeat. Yet it was not so much the thought of the secret I was guarding for France, as of the trembling girl beside me, which dominated my action. She was in my care, under my protection, and—I loved her. I knew it in that instant of sudden revealment, as well as I know it now. The secret of my invention was nothing; her reputation was everything. Whatever befell me in this unfortunate affair, her name was not to be dragged into it. I stood up, holding her closely, my mind cleared by determination.

"Then there remains but one way out," I said shortly. "We must escape from this house unseen; you will do whatever I say?"

"Except to leave you—do not ask that."

My pulses leaped at the impulsive words, yet this was no time for dalliance.

"I do not wish you to say that. You are to trust me—my judgment. Say that you will."

There was a moment's hesitancy, in which I could detect her quick breathing.

"Yes. I am not afraid to promise. What is it you mean to do?"

"Spy out the hall first," I answered. "I am convinced there is no way out except through the area door. Wait here until I discover if the passage is clear."

Exercising every caution I unlatched the door, and peered forth through the narrow crack into the dimly lit hallway.

CHAPTER XIII

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

THE only light streamed out through the open door of the room nearly opposite, perhaps six feet distant. I could see merely a bit of its wall, but that reflected the shadow of an occupant, somewhat grotesque in outlines, yet evidently that of a man. That it was Brandt sitting there I had no doubt. What troubled me most was to decide whether, or not, he was alone, and if he faced the door, so as to observe anyone passing along the corridor. The vague shadow on the wall left this uncertain. No one spoke, although I could see the shadow of an arm on the wall, the movement suggesting that the man had lifted a glass to his lips.

I leaned farther out thus to make certain as to the emptiness of the hall. There was another light visible at the rear, where I remembered the kitchen to be located, and I could distinguish the clatter of cooking utensils. The situation was

fairly clear, except for the possible presence also of the chauffeur. Yet moments were so precious to us that I dared not risk further delay. The passage to the area stairs was to all appearance open. To be sure it was dark there, sufficiently so to conceal a watcher, but I had no reason to suspect any guard had been stationed. It was evident enough, from his conversation, as well as his actions, that Brandt, as yet, had no conception that his plans were not working perfectly. To his mind I was safely incarcerated in the cell below, and Mademoiselle as securely locked in her upper room. It was his careless assurance as to all this which gave us our present opportunity. Yet any moment suspicion might arise from the continued absence of Franzen, or some discovery made by either Swigert, or Eisenbarth. I grasped her arm.

"Come; we must endeavor to creep by that open door unobserved; do not let your skirts rustle."

She gathered them closely in one hand, standing in the open, her eyes on my face.

"Is that Captain Brandt?"

"I think so, but I believe he is facing the table.

If so, and we have luck, we can slip by. Keep close to me."

I drew my revolver, fully determined to use it if necessary, and advanced cautiously, rounding the foot of the stairs, and pressed close against the further wall. I was at the very edge of the stream of light, the girl at my shoulder, when Brandt spoke suddenly, the unexpected sound of his voice so close, causing us both to shrink back, and remain motionless.

"The more I think of that idea of yours, Eisenbarth, the better I like it," he said heartily, and arose to his feet, walking back and forth across the room, his shadow outlined on the wall. "It will give us all the time we need, and keep the Frenchman where he cannot bother us. Some joke on him too—hey!"

The other laughed, evidently pleased at the commendation of his chief, and inclined to glorify himself.

"Thought it was rather clever. You see my father-in-law is Captain of this Precinct. He 'll hush the matter up."

"Is he German?"

"Sure. Shall I get him on the wire?"

Brandt stopped his walking, and stood still, apparently staring out into the hall. I could see his face clearly, but we were just beyond the range of his vision.

"Yes," he replied finally. "The sooner that is settled the better. Only be careful what you say. Have him send two discreet men over here at once."

"With an ambulance?"

"No; that might be noticed. We want this pulled off quietly. The body can be taken away in your machine. You can fix matters then so there will be no give-away to the reporters?"

"Money talks."

"That will be all right. Call him up."

The telephone in the alcove, behind heavy curtains, was so far away as to keep us from overhearing much that was said. Detached words, meaning little, reached us, but we could not even guess at the real nature of the message being sent. While I felt convinced that some near-by police station was being communicated with in relation to the death of Ramon, it was impossible for me to discern the object. Of course they would be anxious to be relieved of the presence

of the dead man in the house; probably had concocted some plan whereby they expected to prove his death accidental. Otherwise they would hide it, rather than call in outside aid. Yet what could Brandt mean by his remark relative to a joke being played on someone?

The man stood leaning against the wall just inside the door of the room, listening to Eisenbarth at the telephone. He was in plain view from where we crouched in the shadow of the staircase. We dared not move, even to advance or draw back, for fear of attracting his attention, and I could feel Mademoiselle tremble, as her slender form pressed close against mine. Brandt drew a cigar from his pocket, and struck a match, shadowing the flame with his hands and listening.

"That will be enough, Eisenbarth," he said shortly. "Don't explain. Leave that to me after they get here. Just say we have got them both safe, and will hold them until the men get here—yes, the area door."

He moved forward slightly, applying the flame to his cigar, his back now turned toward us, after a moment asking:

"What did he say?"

"He 'll send a sergeant and detective; I know them both."

"Good! How much will you need to fix it?"

"For how long?"

"Twenty-four hours; after that they can go to the devil for all I care."

I failed to catch the answer, but Brandt moved out of sight, except for his shadow on the wall. Eager as I was to get away, I was afraid to cross that bar of light. As I hesitated the girl whispered:

"What is it they mean to do?"

"You heard all I did."

"No; they spoke German, and I could merely catch words now and then—something about the dead man."

"They have sent for the police to take the body away; they expect to show his death to be accidental."

There was a moment of silence, her breath pulsing against my cheek.

"I—I do not believe that is the purpose," she murmured earnestly. "Did not Brandt tell the other to say 'we have them both safe'?"

"Yes, but—"

"That means you and I! It could refer to no one else. They are going to have us arrested for that murder!"

For an instant I hardly grasped her meaning. It seemed impossible; the audacity of it beyond belief. She must have understood my doubt, for she continued hurriedly, without waiting for me to protest.

"Cannot you see how easy that would be? All it needs is sufficient money to keep the police quiet for a few hours. These men do not expect to press the charge, or convict. The only purpose is to get us out of the way, while Brandt gains the information he seeks, and escapes with it. The dead body must be accounted for as soon as possible."

"He would not dare," I protested.

"He risks nothing, for if the police captain takes the money it seals his lips. The case will never come to trial, or be made public. There are ways to hush such matters up; we learn that in newspaper work. I am not afraid of the arrest—it is only bluff, but there is the other."

"What other?"

"Franzen!" and her voice trembled. "His body will be found also, and—and that will be serious."

The whole situation flashed upon me, but only to arouse my faculties. She was right; she must be right. At least I was sure of this—the police had been sent for, and whatever might be Brandt's real purpose in thus invoking their aid, their arrival would inevitably discover the two tragedies of the night. The result of such discovery would render our position desperate indeed. At whatever cost we must attain the open before the police arrived.

"Go first!" I said, "and wait for me in the dark beyond. Don't hesitate; we must take the risk."

Her eyes flashed into mine an instant questioningly.

"You will follow—at once?"

"Of course; I merely stay to protect you, in case either of those fellows happens to see anything. Be quick, the way is clear."

She slipped along the wall like a shadow, bending slightly, one hand grasping her skirt. As the light streamed over her for a second I saw her face turned toward the open door. Then she

vanished silently into the gloom beyond. There was no sound from within; no evidence of alarm. Someone was idly sliding a drinking glass back and forth across the surface of a table. A voice spoke bruskly:

"What 's keeping Swigert so long? Tell the lazy lout to bring on whatever he has."

Eisenbarth passed hurriedly within less than a yard of me, blinded by the darkness, and guiding himself with one hand on the wall. Before he had taken a dozen steps down the hall I had slipped through the bar of light, and stood beside her. An instant we waited, listening, her fingers grasping my arm.

"Did you see anything?"

"Just a glimpse. Brandt is sitting at the table; I could see the back of his head. Please let 's hurry!"

She started down the stairs, groping her way step by step noiselessly, and I followed closely. At the foot we came together.

"The—the door is locked, but—oh! yes! the key is here!"

It turned with a faint click, and, as the door opened slightly, the gleam of an electric light

some distance away revealed two men outside, one wearing the police uniform. We both stood motionless; then I felt her hand grip mine which held the revolver.

"No, not that!" she murmured swiftly. "Keep it out of sight." Then she stood straight before them.

"You are the officers sent from the station?" she asked, her voice clear and low.

"Yes, madam," respectfully enough.

"You will find Mr. Brandt in the library—the first door to your left up the stairs."

"Who, madam?"

"Captain Brandt, of the German Secret Police; the man who sent for you."

The sergeant glanced uneasily at the silent detective, who stepped forward.

"This is news to us," he said in rougher tone. "It was Issy Eisenbarth who telephoned the station."

"Yes, at Captain Brandt's request," coolly. "You did n't suppose Eisenbarth had any money, did you?"

The detective grinned.

"Never knew him to have," he admitted, "but

he has got some pull. What 's the case, anyhow, sister—suicide?"

"Murder."

"No! and they 've got the ones who did it? Say, what is the game?"

She leaned forward confidentially, her face revealed in the light.

"It may need to be hushed up for a few hours," she whispered. "Captain Brandt will explain inside. He can afford to pay well."

The two men exchanged glances, and then both stared at the girl.

"You 're a wise one, all right," admitted the plain clothes admiringly, "but I 'm not so sure your tip is straight. Where are you two going?"

"We 're newspaper reporters," she answered promptly. "I am on the *Press;* you know me, Snyder. Now wait until I explain; this is a City Associated News man. We got onto this by accident, but are going to keep mum. There is other graft besides the police variety."

The sergeant scratched his head.

"Maybe she 's right, Foley," he said, tapping the other's sleeve. "It 's Miss Probyn. I know

that. I 've seen her at the City Hall more than once. You meant to get safely out of the way before we got here?"

"Yes, and you might as well forget you have ever seen us."

"Well, maybe all you say is straight," broke in the detective roughly, "but it looks damn queer to me. You wait a minute while I see this man Brandt. Stay here with them, Snyder, and don't let either one go till I tell you; watch out now!"

He pushed past us into the narrow entry, shouldering me roughly in getting by. Snyder stood just outside, one foot on the step, his hands gripping his night-stick. The girl leaned back against the brick wall, her face white in the gleam of the electric, breathing heavily. My eyes caught the glimmer of dull metal in her hand nearest me—it was the key, the key of the door. Desperation drove me to action; the delay of an instant meant certain exposure and arrest. The detective must be already at the head of the stairs. There was a chance—one! With a single step I had Snyder by the throat, hurled him about, and drove my fist to his chin. He went staggering backward, stumbled over the

step, and sprawled full length against the stairs. I jammed the door shut.

"Quick, Mademoiselle; the key!"

She held it out, and I thrust it into the lock. Even as the bolt shot home the heavy body of the enraged sergeant crashed against the strong wood. His hands fumbled for the knob.

"Foley!" he yelled savagely, the muffled voice evidencing his injured feelings. "They 've got away. Damn them! They slugged me!"

My eyes met those of Miss Probyn, and she laughed almost hysterically, dazed still with the suddenness of the affair.

"Oh! oh! What shall we do? I—I am all confused."

"You 'll get your senses in a minute. No one is hurt, except that policeman may have a sore head. Come, let 's get out of this—the door will not hold them long. Which path leads to the gate?"

"The roadway is yonder," she gasped, "around the corner of the house. See! there where the car stands." She drew in her breath sharply. "Can you operate a machine, Monsieur?"

"I know the French and German cars."

"This is a Mercedes; I heard someone say—yes, see! oh, such luck!"

There was not so much noise from within; doubtless Brandt had counseled less uproar, being more anxious to escape notice than to recapture us. Indeed our violent disappearance even served him in a way. Yet the two policemen would not remain quiet for long. I took a hasty glance at the machine, and cranked the engine.

"Get in, Mademoiselle," I said, taking her hand in mine, and feeling quite content. "It is nothing to add another crime to our night's catalogue. What is it you say in America, one can hang as well for sheep as lamb. I have it right?"

"Practically so, yes—but I seriously object to hanging for either. There; they have begun on the door again. Let us get out of here."

It was a new car, and a powerful one. My experience with its make was not extensive, and I ran somewhat slowly down the rounded driveway. Someone fired a single shot in our rear, which must have been a signal, for two men stepped out of the shrubbery into the open gateway. I saw them even as Mademoiselle clutched

my arm, and obeying my first swift instinct, turned on full power. They sprang back to escape the flying wheels, one falling headlong; the other, shielded by a stone post, fired three shots, one of which crashed into the tonneau. The same instant we whirled into the street, dashed past an intersection, and plunged into the shadows beyond the arc light. As we took the turn, almost running on two wheels, I saw a policeman racing for the corner, his star gleaming, but we were already past and gone. Two blocks, three blocks, sped by; we leaped a street car track, and then took another turn into a quiet avenue. I slowed down until the machine was almost noiseless, and glanced aside at my companion. Her eyes were like stars, and her hair flying wildly.

"Was n't it great!" she panted. "I—I never rode so fast before."

"Some sport—yes," my own blood pulsing with excitement, "but, Mademoiselle, where are we to go?"

CHAPTER XIV

A MAN AND A MAID

SHE glanced behind, down the dark street, her face sobering instantly.

"Why, I—I hardly know," she confessed, as though the full seriousness of the situation had just dawned upon her again. "We—we are fugitives—thieves! We have stolen this automobile, and—and they can even charge us with murder. Oh! Monsieur, this has been such a horrid night!"

"It certainly has, but through no fault of ours. Whatever we have done has been in self-defense, You must n't lose heart now. We are free for the moment at least, and must plan to remain free. Where are we? Do you know?"

She stared around at the rows of black houses.

"There are no lights to display the numbers. Yes, there is one. I do not recognize this street, but we are on the Thirty-third Street block on the south side. Where is your aeroplane?"

I told her, waiting to learn what she would say, unable to decide for myself even in which direction to drive.

"If we only knew what Brandt—what the police will do," she said, struggling with the problem. "Keep on as you are, only a little faster, while I think."

"We are headed south?"

"Yes; the direction does not greatly matter, so we get safely out of this neighborhood."

We made two or three blocks before she spoke again; I busy guiding the machine over a rather rough roadway, but glancing aside into her face as we passed under the street lights. No passer-by appeared on the sidewalks.

"What time is it, Monsieur?"

"Nearly two o'clock."

"About three hours more of darkness then. I—I do not know what to say—what to decide," and I could distinguish the tremor in her voice. "You see I—I have never been a fugitive from justice before," with a little hysterical laugh. "Even as a newspaper reporter my life has been rather uneventful, and this is a problem not so easily solved. What do you think, Monsieur?"

"My thought is they will make every effort to recapture us," I answered soberly. "Those two dead men will have to be accounted for in some way. To save himself, and gain time to get out of the country, Brandt will certainly endeavor to shift the whole affair onto us. The very fact that we have run away, after resisting the police, will lend probability to his story."

"So I believe. With influence and money it could be hushed up later. Such things are done every day; but we might remain incarcerated for months. But how is it possible for us to escape? Every policeman in the city will be notified within an hour; the railroad depots, the boat landings will all be watched. They have our descriptions, our names, the license number of this machine. Even if we drive furiously into the country the telephone will warn every near-by town. There is not a loop-hole which will not be promptly closed. Even if those men do not succeed in breaking out of the house immediately, they can telephone the alarm to police headquarters. In all probability this has already been done. We are like rats in a trap."

She dropped her head into her hands with a

gesture of despair, her voice breaking into a sob. I touched her gently, my other hand gripping the wheel.

"There is a way out, if we can only make it in time," I said.

"A way!" and I could see the glitter of tears in her eyes, as she glanced up quickly. "You have thought of something?"

"Yes; a wild thought, perhaps, and yet possible, if we only have the nerve to carry the plan out. There are no police patroling the skies."

"The skies!" and she sat upright, facing me. "Do you mean your monoplane? Can that really be done? Would you dare venture upon such a trip in the dark?"

"I have flown in the night more than once," I answered a bit proudly, "and everything is ready, or was last evening. Without doubt De Vigne is there still, and the two of us would have no trouble in getting the machine out of the hangar. Starting it would be more difficult, but I believe it can be managed."

She remained gazing straight at me, as if fascinated.

"You would not be afraid?"

"Afraid!" I laughed. "Of what, Mademoiselle? It is my life; I have already made over a hundred ascensions—one more is nothing. It is you who must consider fear."

"Am I to go with you?"

"Did you imagine I would leave you behind? It hurts me to have you intimate that. I am not a coward; if I was alone involved in this matter I am not even sure I would endeavor to escape its consequences. I believe I could fight clear of these charges, even if Brandt dared to press them, and as to the secret of my monoplane, it is nothing to sacrifice greatly over. The world will know it all in a few months. I have not guarded it so much because of its value, but out of a sense of honor to my government, and because I could not yield to a German spy. So, unless you go with me, there will be no flight."

"I can stay and face it all—"

"No; not with my permission," and I grasped her hand, holding it firmly in mine at the rim of the wheel. "You are a woman; you cannot become involved in the publicity of such an escapade; you cannot be imprisoned under such charges, however false. Your reputation, your

womanhood is at stake. I have drawn you into this affair; now I must extricate you without publicity. So far as I can see there is no other way possible. If we escape, if we vanish, not a word of this night's work will ever be made public. It will be hidden, hushed up; both Brandt and the police will see the necessity."

"But why do you care—for me?" she asked suddenly. "I have been the cause of it all; but for my interference you would be quietly sleeping at the hotel. I deserve punishment, Monsieur, and—and it cannot hurt so awfully. I am only a newspaper woman."

"You are far more than that to me; don't belittle yourself. I am not prejudiced, merely because you have been compelled to earn a living. I am a man, you a woman—nothing else matters now. You will come?"

"I cannot," pleadingly. "You should not ask; it would only make matters worse. Cannot you see it would?"

"I do not see, Mademoiselle. You are in as great danger here as I—even more from my point of view. You would be exposed to every indignity, to insult, to probable arrest. Am I

to escape, and leave you to such a fate? I would forever despise myself. If you remain, I stay here with you."

"But, Monsieur—"

"No, wait—listen. You think I do not care; that I merely urge this out of courtesy. That is not true—it is because I do care. I respect, admire, love you! I have told it all."

The words were swift, impetuous. I had not meant to speak then, yet once started, could not be checked. She drew back, clinging to the seat, her eyes wide open, searching my face.

"You—you jest, Monsieur."

"No; look into my eyes, and see."

"Then you must be crazy, or," she laughed bitterly, "you presume on my unfortunate position. You think me of a class to whom such words can be spoken lightly?"

"You are angry?"

"No, not that. I am hurt, mortified, Monsieur. I—I have trusted you too much; it—it is all my fault. You do not understand American girls. I—I never once dreamed you would think that of me."

"I think nothing wrong, Mademoiselle; noth-

ing lightly," I protested warmly. "There was no disrespect in my words. I should not have spoken so suddenly, I admit, but the words could not be restrained. You believe me?"

"No, Monsieur, I do not. It is impossible that you can be in earnest. You are an officer of France, a man of high rank socially, of distinguished family. I am a girl you have met on the streets, unknown, obliged to toil for a livelihood. We have been thrown together in a peculiar manner, and, in some mysterious way, I have proven attractive to you. I understand what has occurred; I do not blame you. You have your European conception of such a situation. You feel at perfect liberty to make love to such as I. It is an honor done me; you are incapable of comprehending my indignation."

"You mistake, Mademoiselle."

"Do not protest—it is useless, perfectly useless! You have your world, Monsieur; I have mine. There is nothing in common between them. I might have gone with you, but for this. Now it is over." Her eyes deserted my face, and glanced ahead, searching the street; the expression of her voice changed. "I know where

we are now, and it will be safer for us to leave the car. The police will be searching for that, and will know its number. You will do as I say?"

"Certainly."

She pointed forward to the left.

"There is an open court yonder, surrounded by houses, a small, private park. You can see the open gate under that electric light. Drive the machine in there, and turn to the right, so it will be concealed by the wall. Yes, this is the place; now turn off the power. No one will discover it here until after daylight."

She sprang to the ground, without waiting for assistance, and I followed; determined not to permit her to escape without further explanation, yet embarrassed by her prompt action. It was very still, the sky slightly overcast, the street beyond the wall deserted. The light over the gateway streamed around us, and I could clearly distinguish her face.

"Mademoiselle, you will listen, you will hear me," I began eagerly. "Surely you have found me a gentleman."

"According to your standards—yes," she re-

turned frankly. "I have already said I did not blame you. The indiscretion has been mine; you have every reason to think lightly of me. But now I must protect myself." She held out her hand. "Let us be friends, Monsieur, and speak of this no longer. Do I have your promise to respect my wish?"

I took the hand in both of mine, but my lips failed to respond. There was something in the uplifted face I failed to understand.

"Why do you hesitate? Must I be more explicit?"

"Your meaning is not altogether clear," I managed to say. "I am your friend always, but cannot surrender the hope of being more."

"The future is a wide sea, and we sail for different ports. 'T is not likely our ships will ever meet again, but it is better to part with pleasant rather than unpleasant memories. Why should you insist on thus—thus insulting me?"

"Insult!" the harsh word stung me like a whip. "Is the love of a man insult?"

"Sometimes—yes. What else can it be now? You know nothing of me, except my name. Twelve hours ago you were not even aware of

my existence. Twelve hours more, and I will remain but a vague memory. It is mockery for you to talk of love; you play with what to me is sacred. Please spare me from more. I—I appeal to you, Monsieur, as a gentleman."

I bowed, releasing her hand.

"I cannot refuse, Mademoiselle; yet you are wrong—I have known you all my life."

"How absurd!"

"But it is not. You are the realization of a dream. I knew last evening, as we sat at table together, this was so. Time has nothing to do with love, unless to strengthen it. These few hours have done more to reveal your nature to me, my nature to you, than would years in a drawing room. At least know that I am in earnest; that I speak from the heart."

She stood motionless, looking straight at me, her breath quickening.

"But who am I?" she asked. "You do not even know."

"Fortunately," with a smile, "I do not even care. You are yourself, which is enough."

She laughed, breaking the tenseness of her attitude by a little gesture of dismissal.

"How foolish this all is, Monsieur! I cannot afford to dream such dreams. Life has always been most practical to me. Nor can you now. We forget where we are, the conditions surrounding us, the peril of delay. The coming of daylight will mean the arrest of both."

"Very true, yet if arrest is to be the portion of either, I prefer to be the one," I said quietly. "You speak as though you wished me to get away free, and desert you to the police?"

"No; I have friends who will shelter me. I am not alarmed about myself in the least. It will be unpleasant, perhaps, and I may have to leave the city later. But with you it is different. You are a stranger and helpless. There is a chance for you to escape if you act promptly—at least you have encouraged me to think so—and I am simply imploring you to accept it before it is too late. If you will not for your own sake, then do this for me, Monsieur. You speak of my safety, my reputation; do you not realize what your arrest would mean to me? It would inevitably lead to exposure; no matter how closely your lips were sealed, Brandt and those policemen would have to tell the story. I ap-

peal to your generosity, your friendship: yes, even your protestation of love."

"And you will not accompany me?"

"Assuredly not."

"What will you do? I must know, Mademoiselle; I cannot desert you to any uncertainty."

"But I have told you already. Oh! why waste all this time! I will go to friends who will conceal me until it is safe for me to leave Chicago—friends, whom the police will never suspect of harboring me. The place I mean is not far away."

"And I am never to see you again? or hear from you? You are willing to drop thus completely out of my life?"

The long lashes drooped over her eyes, her face turned away.

"I—I have no expectation of anything else," she said finally, "although it would be pleasant to be assured you had met with no accident."

I caught her hand again.

"You will give me an address?" I exclaimed eagerly, "some place where a letter will surely reach you?"

She laughed, lifting her face again to the light.

"Why, of course, I will do that. How persistent you are; one would almost believe you actually in earnest. Care of Miss Sadler, the *Press,* will reach me safely. Now that I have paid the price, will you go?"

"Yes; you leave me no choice. Do I part with you here?"

"No, we will go together to the corner three blocks south. There is an all-night drug store there where I can phone for a cab. Then you can take a car going directly past where your monoplane is. Let us go."

We walked in the glare of light down the graveled driveway, leaving the silenced motor behind, securely concealed by the shadow of the high wall. Late as the hour was, in the still night, we advanced without thought of any immediate danger. Indeed the occurrence of the past few hours was more like a dream than a reality to our minds. The very swiftness of events had left us dazed; my own thoughts were more concerned with her than with our pursuers, near as they might be.

Once she asked:

"Do you suppose Brandt will go there to-night?"

"Where? to the hangar?"

"Yes; it would be disastrous if they arrived there first."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"The fortunes of war, Mademoiselle," I replied rather indifferently, "but I imagine they will seek for me at the hotel first. An attempt to get away by air would scarcely occur to any of them as possible."

"I presume not," she agreed softly. "That is why it may succeed, but—but someway the very thought frightens me."

We came out upon the street, rounding the corner post of stone, and confronted a policeman, who stepped forth from the shadow, with a gesture of his night-stick in command to halt.

CHAPTER XV

HIGH SPEED FORWARD

THE fellow stared suspiciously into our faces, and I felt the girl's fingers clasp my arm as if in signal for me to restrain myself. The scrutiny was over in a moment, neither of us stirring, waiting for his first word to disclose whether or not he knew we were wanted by his superiors. My own brain was a blur; I could think of no way to reasonably explain our presence there at such an hour. That the policeman was also puzzled was evident by the expression on his face. Our appearance was not that of night prowlers, of street waifs.

"Whut 's ther two ov' yer doing, dodgin' 'round here in ther dark?" he questioned shortly. "I niver saw nuthin' ov yer till just now. Come now, whut 's it mane?"

His eyes were upon me, but it was the woman who, with quick wit, answered:

"That is all right, officer," and she opened her

small hand-bag, and extracted a card. "This will explain."

He took it rather doubtfully, and held it up to the light, studying out the letters slowly.

"Is it a raporter ye are! So thet 's it; Oi 've heard ov famale raporters many a toime, but yez th' furst specimen thet iver floated my way. Th' *Press* was it ye workin' on? Not much av a papper ter my thinkin'. An' th' other wan was he a raporter too?"

She nodded pleasantly, but I could feel her form trembling with excitement.

"Whut 's th' matter with th' man then? Sure has he lost his voice?"

She drew a quick breath, still holding tight to my arm.

"He is a German, connected with the *Zeitung;* he speaks English very imperfectly."

The officer's eyes swept our faces, as though not entirely satisfied with this explanation, yet one thing was clear, we were unrecognized; he had received no orders regarding our arrest.

"What was the two av yez doing out here at this toime o' night?"

"Interviewing the German Ambassador. He

is spending the night at the Senator's home in the park, and we were sent out to talk with him. That is why this gentleman accompanied me, because he speaks the language. It is late, officer, and we are in a hurry to get in our copy. Can you tell me where the nearest public phone station is?"

He jerked his thumb back over his shoulder, returning the menacing night-stick to his belt.

"It 's two blocks thet way, Miss," more courtesy in his tones, "where yer see the red light. Oi 'm travelin' that direction meself ter call up th' station."

We started off together, and I caught the questioning flash of her eyes. The same thought, and fear was in both our minds. We had walked a block, the officer slightly in advance, before she spoke again.

"How often do you report to your station?"

" 'Bout ivery hour; Oi 'm a bit late this toime, wid a plain drunk ter take home, over on Prairie Avenoo."

"You receive instructions then, I suppose?"

"Plenty o' 'em, Miss," and he shot back a glance at her that closed the conversation, "the

sargint gives up information with grate freedom."

The situation was a ticklish one. Her eyes were grave and thoughtful in the gleam of the street lights, but I could venture no suggestion because of the strangeness of the locality. One or two daring plans for evading the officer flashed through my mind, but I could not venture putting either into operation without first consulting my lady. This was a case for her quick, feminine wit, rather than my bungling methods. Yet that we both feared the same thing was apparent. The officer had not communicated with his station for an hour. We had not been absent from the house that length of time. If an alarm had been made; if we were wanted, the information would be given him at once, as soon as he pulled the box, and reported. That he would instantly recognize us as being the parties sought was beyond question. The description Brandt could furnish of us both would be conclusive and accurate. The dullest cop on the force could not mistake our identity. Besides it was clear this fellow was not entirely satisfied even now as to the truth of the story

Miss Probyn had told—the extreme lateness of the hour, our sudden appearance on foot, was calculated to arouse suspicion. In all probability he would not entirely lose sight of us until more thoroughly convinced. Violence was impossible, as he was evidently a powerful fellow, well armed, and besides we were approaching a street car line, and a corner, where, even at this early hour, men were awake and stirring.

As we drew nearer the change was very apparent. There was a news-stand on the curb, the Italian boy in charge already busily arranging his first supply of morning papers in glare of the arc light. Behind him was an all-night drug store open for business, and two doors away a restaurant, one of its tables occupied by three men who had evidently been making a night of it. Out in front was a taxi-cab, the chauffeur nodding sleepily in one corner of his seat. Beyond a few stores exhibited lighted windows, although the doors were closed. A street car jangled past, containing a few passengers, pausing at the corner to let off a fellow in bedraggled evening dress, half seas over, and then went noisily on again. The policeman watched the belated

one's uncertain progress up a side street with professional solicitude.

"Lives in the third house," he explained gravely. "He 'll make it all right. Your phone is there in th' drug-store, lady. It 's th' other corner for me."

He started across, but I noticed glanced back to be sure of what we were doing. There was no car in sight approaching the corner, and we could not vanish on foot in the brief time required to pull his box. Besides he merely vaguely suspicioned us, without any thought that we were actually wanted. I turned with her into the drug-store door, dimly wondering what possible means of escape from this predicament had occurred to her. I had no scheme, no plan. The thought of that policeman approaching the box dominated my brain. Would he come rushing back to put us under arrest?

"Stay here," she murmured, without venturing to glance aside. "I 'll step within, so he can feel safe. Be ready to crank that taxi, and handle the chauffeur. You understand?"

"Yes."

"It will all have to be done in a minute. Run

the instant the officer turns to insert his key in the box."

She slipped away, and I stood there, every nerve strained, watching. The burly figure was plainly visible, and I could discern each movement. On the opposite curb he stopped and stared back through the gloom toward the lights. What he saw was sufficiently reassuring, for she was within bending over the telephone book, and I was leaning carelessly against the frame of the window, apparently idly waiting for the lady to reappear. No doubt with that glance the fellow dismissed his last vague suspicion of us—to all appearance we were exactly what we had claimed to be. He turned to the box, and dragged out his key, his broad back toward the drug-store; then bent forward to fit the key into the lock. I poised myself for the rush, my heart beginning to throb, my muscles tense in eagerness of action. I waited a second, fearful he might venture one more glance, then leaped silently across to the curb, and gripped the crank of the machine.

It had to be accomplished with one whirl, and it was. At the sudden reverberation the slumber-

ing chauffeur came to life, ripping out a volley of oaths before he fairly had his eyes open.

"Here you!" I ordered sternly, shoving the muzzle of a revolver into his face. "Stay where you are." She was at the side door and had opened it. With one step I slipped in beside her, and thrust the barrel hard against the fellow's neck. "Straight ahead! and drive fast."

He shot one frightened glance back at me, caught the gleam of steel, and turned on the power. The taxi shot forward, flinging us both back against the cushions. I caught one glimpse of the men in the restaurant springing to their feet, and the startled face of the newsboy as we whirled madly past his stand. I could not see the policeman, but heard his revolver bark twice, mingled with a command to halt. Then we were out of the light, plunging recklessly along beside the car track.

"Which way?" I asked the figure beside me.

"First turn to the left," she replied breathlessly. "They cannot catch us; have the man drive slower."

I gave the order, and the fellow obeyed, screwing his head around in an effort to look behind.

Evidently the sound of a woman's voice had slightly revived his courage.

"Say, Miss," he implored, "have that fellow take his gun away. I ain't goin' to play no trick on you."

"You will drive just as we say?" she asked. "I know the city."

"Sure; we git used to all sorts o' rum affairs running night cabs. I don't care where you go, so I git paid, only," his voice sorrowful, "I lost a matter o' seven dollars leavin' those guys back there."

"I 'll pay their bill, as well as my own," I said convincingly. "It will be worth your while to drive as we tell you, and keep quiet about it. Only don't forget the revolver is here, and I know how to use it. Tell him where you wish to go, Mademoiselle."

She leaned forward, her face to the single opened window, speaking rapidly. I heard her name a number of to me unfamiliar streets, but failed to distinguish clearly all she said. The chauffeur asked no questions, nodding his head, and saying "Yes, mum," his eyes on the street ahead.

"Keep within the speed limits; we do not care to stir up any more policemen."

He grinned knowingly, and she settled back into the darkness beside me.

"Your orders sounded rather complicated," I ventured in a whisper. "Are you sure he understands?"

"Oh, yes; to one knowing the streets they were simple enough. It is necessary to confuse our pursuers, or they might guess where we were going."

"Do you mind telling me where that is? I cannot help feeling an interest in knowing."

She laughed, somewhat nervously.

"Why, of course; I have assumed absolute command, have n't I? You must n't be angry, Monsieur, because I knew the way, and you did not. That was my reason for being so forward."

"I understood that, and am most grateful. I was unable to perceive any means of escape. You are a wonderful woman."

"I? Oh, no! no! I am so frightened it is remarkable that I can think at all. The seeing this taxi at the curb was an inspiration. I hardly dared hope we could make it quickly

enough, but—but it was our only chance. The whole credit is yours for handling the chauffeur. All I had to do was to open the door, and get in with a rush," she laughed.

"You originated the plan; the possibility never occurred to me."

"I grant that; merely a flash of intuition with which they say my sex is endowed," she admitted. "But I contend the execution was far the more important."

There was a moment of silence, and, in the flashing past of a street light, I caught a glimpse of her face, a swift, tantalizing glimpse.

"But you have not told me, Mademoiselle?"

"Told you what? If there be any secret I know it not."

"Our destination."

"But you heard what I said to the chauffeur?"

"Only a part—a mere jumble of street names."

She drew a quick breath, leaning slightly forward, one hand grasping the window frame in front.

"We are going to where your machine is stored," she answered, in low voice, not alto-

gether steady. "When we get there you must assume command."

"To the hangar!" and I could not restrain an accent of exultation. "You will go with me, Mademoiselle?"

"What else is there I could do?" she asked gravely. "I could not leave you to wander about alone. I—I had no choice left, but to trust you."

"I am cruel enough to rejoice," I said, and placed my hand upon hers.

"Monsieur; that is not nice. I said 'trust you'; I meant your courtesy, your consideration. Please understand I am not afraid physically; that is not it at all. Under ordinary conditions I would welcome the excitement of such an experience; I enjoy taking chances. In one sense I have enjoyed our adventures tonight. Perhaps I am of a strange nature, altogether too unconventional, but I am what I am. This is not an apology, only an explanation." She laughed again, her eyes flashing across to mine in a passing gleam of light. "So that is not my fear at all," she went on, giving me no opportunity to interrupt, or protest. "The physical dan-

ger involved gives me no concern. You are an expert aviator, Monsieur, and I can trust you fully on that score. It is something vastly different which makes me hesitate. Do you realize what I risk, Monsieur, by such an indiscretion? I may even forfeit your own respect."

"How can you say that? or even dream such a thing?"

"Because I know something of human nature," she returned regretfully. "No, listen; you have ventured already much farther than you would have dared had our first meeting been a conventional one. You may like me, it is true—I certainly hope you do—but nevertheless I am not on the same plane in your estimation with the ladies of your own world. Oh, but I am not; your words cannot deceive me. They go into one ear, and out the other as they should—for I know."

"That I am insincere? untrustworthy?"

"Oh, no! not nearly so bad as that. If that was my conception, Monsieur, I would leave you at the next corner. See! we are almost there, yet I do not order the chauffeur to stop. Why? Because I am going to trust you—trust you to

be a gentleman. Is that sufficiently explicit, Monsieur?"

I bent my head, comprehending fully her meaning and purpose. The clear insistence of her words brought conviction instantly. I could not pretend to any misunderstanding.

"I yield to your interpretation of human nature," I agreed, seeking to dismiss the matter lightly. "But please remember the exception to all rules."

"I remain just a little hopeful," she responded, apparently in the same spirit, "but must leave you to demonstrate that under other conditions."

"Then you are not so indifferent?"

"I have never expressed indifference, Monsieur; all of life is of interest to me. I merely strive to guard against mistakes."

I stared forth into the night, silenced for the moment; then sought to distinguish her face. She was looking out at the houses whirling past.

"Do you know where we are?"

"Nearing Fifty-ninth Street; we shall turn east in a moment toward the lake. Your hangar is not far from the shore?"

"No; I could see water in the distance yester-

day; a block, perhaps two, away; I did not ask."

"It is where I supposed. I remember the vacant lot there. We have a few moments more; will you not tell me about your machine? I—I know so little, and—and surely I ought to know something."

CHAPTER XVI

MISS PROBYN CHOOSES

"GLADLY," I said, "if I only understood what it was you desired to learn; to me it is most simple."

"You have no fear? no doubt but what this flight you contemplate can be safely made?"

"None whatever, Mademoiselle," smilingly. "With me it is but one of many."

"Yes, but not under such conditions; in the dark, without the assistance of your men, traversing a strange country. Is it not reckless to attempt such a thing?"

"Of course I would prefer it otherwise," I answered, appreciating her doubt. "But where is the choice, Mademoiselle? You say it offers the only free egress from this city; the only safety from arrest. I do not recall whether it was originally your suggestion, or mine, but I perceive nothing particularly dangerous in the venture."

"Not even if you transport a passenger?"

"The machine was constructed with that in view; it was built for military use, to carry an observer as well as an operator. I have had a companion with me in all my long-distance flights."

"Is the monoplane very large, Monsieur?"

"Not extraordinary; the weight, with all supplies aboard, is about twelve hundred pounds, and the aerofoils have a spread of thirty-two feet."

"The aerofoils?"

"The wings I mean; surely you have seen aerial demonstrations?"

"Only at a distance, when high in the air," she explained. "I possess only a vague idea of the machines used."

"Well, mine does not differ in general appearance from those others. I steer by foot levers, and use small wing tips—ailerons—with which to secure stability. This is the latest French type, but the one peculiarity, which I am seeking to guard from publicity, is the motor; it is of great power, and practically noiseless. That is what gives it such value from a military stand-

point. It is almost inaudible a hundred feet away when at full speed."

"What is full speed?"

"With a passenger I have made ninety miles an hour."

She looked at the face of her watch in the gleam of a passing light, the cab slowing down as it rounded a corner.

"And we have two hours yet until daylight—one hundred and eighty miles."

"Far too much to expect," I explained quickly. "The air conditions may not be right, and many things might occur to cause delay. Yet even if we attained half that speed we should be beyond danger. Once safely in the air, and we can laugh at pursuit."

"You fear trouble before then?" anxiously.

"Yes, I do, Mademoiselle; I do not believe Brandt will be foiled so easily. He is the very one to suspect this plan of ours, and will hasten here to get ahead. Besides it is the secret of my motor which he is so eager to learn. He cares little for me, or you—what becomes of us—so long as he can shift the suspicions of the police in our direction, and thus be free himself.

Wherever he sends the others in search, he himself will come here, assured that if we are not present, he will discover a clear field for investigation. But I do not imagine he will come alone—he is hardly that kind."

"What will you do?"

"Discover first just what we must meet. Are we really there?"

"Yes, I think so."

I touched the shoulder of the chauffeur, and he glanced around startled.

"Stop a block this side of where the lady told you," I said shortly. "Turn into a side street first, and be quiet about it."

"Yes, sir," evidently relieved.

We rounded into a dark opening, and came to a stop against the curb. Before us was a block of unlighted houses, almost alike in general appearance, while the deserted walk was overshadowed by trees. I stepped out, and assisted Miss Probyn to follow, noting how anxiously she surveyed the shadows. I handed the chauffeur a bill.

"That will make up your loss."

"Yes, sir, thank you. Shall I wait here?"

"No; disappear; go a block south before you turn. Good night."

He touched his cap, and, in a moment more, we were alone. I felt her hand clasp my arm, and looked down into her face. Now that I was upon my feet once more, and in command of the affair, my natural coolness reasserted itself; I felt a confidence that we were destined to succeed. I could only rejoice at the sequence of events which had conspired to compel her to remain with me.

"You are frightened now, Mademoiselle," I whispered, "just as I begin to enjoy myself."

"I am—a little—yes," she admitted, glancing up into my eyes, as though endeavoring to interpret my meaning. "You have made me fear that Captain Brandt is here before us."

"That was only a guess; but even if he is I feel perfectly confident of handling the situation. We have won so far against the man, and I do not believe the god of luck has deserted us."

I spoke lightly, but the expression of her face did not change.

"It is the police I am afraid of."

"And it is my faith that Brandt will hesitate

to make use of those allies. He would prefer that we be sought, and not found, just at present. I did suggest that he might suspect our plan of escape, and come here to intercept us, but I do not, in the least, believe that true. He would not deem such an attempt possible. He does not understand the nature of my machine, its readiness for service, or the ease with which it can be launched. The ordinary monoplane requires a crew of men, and hours of preparation. I suspect he may be here ahead of us, and with assistance, but they will not be police. He will take this opportunity, believing I am fleeing from arrest, to break into the hangar, and investigate my discoveries. Our appearance will be a surprise."

She did not answer, but her eyes were upon my face questioningly, and I went on explaining.

"His confidence of safety is what I count on to bring us success. This is really the very last place where he would expect me to appear. He knows by this time of the death of Franzen, and your disappearance with me. He will take it for granted that I killed the man, and have forgotten everything else in an eagerness to escape

arrest. He will come here unprepared for serious resistance, expecting to meet De Vigne alone. One of the Pinkerton guard, at least, is in his pay, and he would not expect my man to put up much of a fight single-handed. It is our audacity which gives us a chance to win out."

"But what can I do?"

"Nothing, except to remain quiet, and out of danger. You have a pistol?"

"No, certainly not."

"I thought you threatened Franzen. You will stay where I tell you? You will wait for me?"

She looked directly into my eyes.

"I—I do not see what else I can do," she said soberly. "But—but, Monsieur, am I doing right?"

"You are simply trusting me, showing faith in me; I think that is right."

"But it is all so strange, so unusual; I feel as though I was in a dream, and must awaken. I cannot even think clearly, and decide for myself."

"Then let me decide for you," and I clasped the hand pressing my sleeve. "Listen, Made-

moiselle. You are involved in all this so tightly that you cannot possibly escape the coils in any other way—can you? Even if Brandt does not name you as an accomplice of mine, that detective recognized you at the door, and later you gave your business card to the patrolman. They will search every place where you are known to go; will interview your friends. In all this city you could find no spot in which to hide, nor any means of getting out."

"But—but," her fingers clung to me, and I could feel the trembling of her form, "that means my reputation, my good name—"

"Yes, I know it does; either way they are involved. Yet it seems to me an arrest, a trial in the police court, would result the more disastrously; the evidence is strong. However if you choose the only other course, you have nothing to rely upon but myself—my word, my honor. Can you trust these, Mademoiselle?"

I could hear the leaves rustling in the branches overhead, the distant clangor of a passing street car. Her eyes were downcast, then uplifted again to mine.

"It means," she said slowly, thoughtfully,

"that if we fail, if any accident happens, we shall both be captured, and have to face these horrible charges together?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"And will my going add to your danger? lessen your chances to escape?"

"Not in the least," eagerly. "I told you before the monoplane was built to bear two persons; it will ride steadier."

She drew a deep breath, but her hand remained in mine.

"And it means," she went on, as though there had been no interruption on my part, "if we do succeed in getting safely out of the city, I shall have to disappear, utterly vanish."

"Merely from Chicago for the present," I assured her hastily. "No one will ever press this case. Once Brandt fails in gaining what he is seeking after, he will be only too glad to hush the whole matter up. The German Embassy will realize that a court trial would reveal their entire system of secret service in this country, and will devise means for concealing the whole affair. The police have no special incentive to hunt us down, and will doubtless find it convenient to do

otherwise. I believe, Mademoiselle, that if we can once make the escape there will be no pursuit."

"Then I merely disappear? simply drop out of sight?"

"Yes, your friends will wonder, but—"

"Oh, it is not so much friends. I have acquaintances, of course, but none who will be greatly alarmed. I was not thinking of others, but myself, Monsieur—my life."

"Your life? You mean your future?"

"Yes; it is such a reckless thing to do, a leap into the dark. You do not realize the consequences; I am not even sure that I do—but—but it frightens me a little. I sprang into the cab, because I was impelled to by the conditions; it was the impulse of a moment. But now I hesitate to go on, to do what I half promised you I would. It means I must risk everything."

"You have no reference to danger—physical danger?"

Her quick gesture was scornful.

"Not for a moment. I could laugh at that. Nor do I fear others, what the world might say, the scandal of tongues. What I am afraid of,

Monsieur, is myself, my own self-respect, my own judgment of right and wrong. For I am my own judge, and abide by my judgment. You believe in me, Monsieur?"

"I do."

"Yet you have known me only through the darkness of this night. Why, if it was not so serious, it would be ridiculous. I—I cannot laugh, and yet I am half inclined. Can you conceive of such a condition? You barely know my name, my business; you cannot by any possibility read my character, or be acquainted with my associates. Yet you urge me to fly with you in the night to some unknown spot; ask me to leave all and trust you, a stranger. Monsieur, why do you do this? how can you venture to ask it of me? Is it because you think me of a lower order? of a class to care little for consequences? Is it your foreign conception of women who work, who earn their own living, which gives you courage to make such a proposal? Do you realize what it may cost me to say yes?"

"I think I do, Mademoiselle," I replied earnestly, moved by the intensity of her manner, "yet your words are unjust. The choice has be-

come restricted to one of two things—to remain here, and face the certainty of arrest, or trust yourself to my skill and my manhood. I cannot believe you lack confidence in either."

Her hand clasp tightened.

"I do not," she said firmly. "If I did I should not even hesitate."

"Then why do you? What is it you fear?"

"Myself; my own judgment. But I am going to trust it, Monsieur; I am going with you, wherever you go."

"You are strange, Mademoiselle," gazing down into her face. "You will not let me say what I wish, yet you trust me in everything?"

"Yes, in everything. It must be that, or nothing. I have, as you say, only the one choice between two. Very well, I have chosen; it is to trust you. You understand, Monsieur?"

"That you go where I go."

"And do whatever you say."

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE HANGAR

SOMEWAY, as never before in all my experience with the sex, this woman held me from her. Even as she voiced her trust, there remained a reserve between us unbroken. She accepted my protection, yielded to my suggestion, and yet I could not determine safely the state of mind which impelled her to this action. There were words of love trembling upon my lips, but they remained unspoken. I longed to pour forth protestation and promise, but was restrained by fear lest such language would drive her away. I had no thought that she actually cared for me, other than a friendship born of the night's adventures. There was nothing in either words or actions to yield me greater hope. She had simply chosen the part which seemed to her best. It had no direct reference to me; the choice would have been the same had it involved any other man in whom she reposed confidence.

I seemed to read all this in her uplifted eyes, as I held her hands tightly clasped in mine, and the tease was fully aware of my predicament, her smile breaking into soft laughter.

"You are glad!"

"Certainly I am; now I can go forward in confidence."

"But I will only burden you."

"Impossible, Mademoiselle; rather you inspire."

"Compliments, Monsieur, compliments," and she drew herself gently away. "To listen only wastes time, and we need the moments. You know how to proceed?"

"Yes, we will go now. If anyone heard the sound of the motor car, they will believe it merely turned this corner, and passed on."

There was a high brick wall, surrounding some institution, and we kept along in its shadow, walking noiselessly. This being in the residence district no one was upon the street at so early an hour. A policeman appeared under a distant light, a mere dark shadow, and we waited silently until he disappeared up a side street. Then we hurried forward to the edge of the va-

cant lot. In the darkness nothing appeared familiar, yet I knew the hangar was not far away, as it had been erected not far from the street running north and south. I stared out into the open space, hoping to see some gleam of light which would act as a guide, but all was black silence. In her nervousness the girl pressed close to my side, and I could hear her swift breathing.

"Is this the place, Monsieur?"

"It must be; it is situated the same, although there is nothing I recognize. The hangar should be there," pointing, "but I perceive no light."

She looked in the direction indicated, shading her eyes with one hand.

"There is something to the left; just a shapeless something, it might be a shed."

We groped our way forward cautiously, across a slight ditch, edged with weeds, and then over the irregular land, covered with long grass. Our feet sank into this silently, but the depressions caused me to stumble, and I again caught her hand. Every step took us farther from the street lamps, and I could no longer distinguish her face; ahead the gloom was almost impene-

trable. Suddenly she stopped, holding me tightly.

"Wait! be still," she whispered swiftly. "I can see now; kneel down here—look where I point."

I made out the outlines, but they were vague, indistinct. Her eyes must have been better than mine, for as I continued to stare at the object, she spoke again.

"Do you see? It is an automobile. Did your men have one?"

"No," instantly realizing what this must mean. "Brandt is ahead of us. That is why there is no light; he is up to mischief already. If I only knew exactly where the hangar was! I am lost in this darkness."

"It is there, Monsieur, I am sure—beyond the machine. I can see something there darker than the sky. What will you do?"

"Examine the car first. We must be sure it is empty. Keep behind me now, but not so far as to lose sight of me."

Without waiting to hear any protest I moved forward, revolver in hand, assured she would never remain far away, yet anxious to be free

to face alone any danger that might confront us. That this automobile had been used to transport Brandt, and some of his party, I had no doubt. It could be no one else, for they alone had an object to be accomplished there in the small hours of the night. And I must win out against them at whatever cost; yet I was alone—worse than alone, handicapped by the presence of the girl, and pitted against I knew not how many. My strength lay in the darkness of the night, and the fact that Brandt would naturally think this the most unlikely place for me to come. If, by any chance, he had grown careless—had become reckless in the apparent success of his scheme to be rid of me—then there was still hope I might checkmate the fellow even single-handed. It was worth the trying, and I had far more to gain than lose in the venture.

In this spirit I approached the black shadow of the machine from the rear, studying its outlines as best I could in the gloom, becoming more and more convinced that it stood there deserted. A moment later this was verified, as I crept along the side, and felt within, to assure myself no one slept in the seats. As I straightened up

again, satisfied on this point, I perceived her shadow already at the rear wheels.

"There is no one there?"

"No, and the power is off. A seven-passenger car, so it is hard to judge how many are present."

"You believe it brought Captain Brandt?"

"Yes, and others. It could be no one else here at such an hour, and he would not be alone in a car of this size. At first I imagined he might expect me to come here, but I have changed my mind. He believes we are frightened by the police, and have found some hiding place. Otherwise he would have guards out watching for me to appear; he would never leave this car unprotected. Do you think he would?"

She stood thinking, staring about into the darkness, hesitating to answer.

"I—I should not suppose so, unless—unless it is a trap, Monsieur; but you are a soldier, you can judge better than I."

"And I shall take no unnecessary risks. I might be reckless without you to protect, but could not be with you here. Can you see the shed?"

"Yes, it is almost straight ahead, a long, low building, but it is all dark."

"If there was a light," I explained, "it would not show from this side, as the only opening is to the east. There is a small workshop at the north end, built on to the original, but with a door between, and a separate entrance. We will try to attain that."

"Am I to go with you?"

"Will not that be better than remaining here alone? This is a gloomy spot, and someone might come out. Once in the shop safely, and the chances of discovery are lessened."

"I can do as you say. I am not going to be afraid—but—Monsieur—"

"Yes."

"You—you will be careful! You realize what it will mean to me if anything happens to you?"

"I do, Mademoiselle; the situation would be distressing. I will do my best."

"But that is not it," she insisted, speaking without restraint. "I was not considering my danger so much as yours. These men could have no object in injuring me, but would gladly do you harm. I—I could not bear that."

"You do care then! I am something to you?"

"Of course I care; I should be a strange girl if I did not. You are much to me; so much you must guard yourself."

"For your sake?"

She did not hesitate.

"Yes—for my sake. You promise me?"

In the dark I bent down and pressed my cheek to her own, and, to my surprise, she made no effort to draw away.

"That is a custom in my country," I said gravely, half fearing she might be offended, "the symbol of a pledge."

"I understand," and she stood very straight facing me. "This night has broken down every conventional barrier. It has changed me; I cannot feel or think as I could yesterday. I do not know what legerdemain has been resorted to, Monsieur, but I am not the same girl you first met; all of life looks different. Perhaps you can tell me sometime how such a miraculous change could occur in a single night. So I accept your pledge," and she gave me both hands, "just as you offer it. Now we are pardners, as they say out West. Is not that it, Monsieur."

"Pardners? perhaps I do not comprehend that term; you mean friends?"

"Even more than friends; associated together for a purpose; trusting each other. You know now?"

"Yes, and we will go at once, and learn our fate—as—as pardners."

It may have been a hundred feet to the hangar, grass-covered, but somewhat rough. I could not help thinking how difficult it would be to start the monoplane if the field beyond was equally irregular, yet surely it would not be; the mechanics would have chosen better, and besides, as I remembered from my brief visit in the afternoon, there was nothing to criticise. We saw nothing, heard nothing, as we drew closer to the black bulk of building, and groped our way along its side, endeavoring to locate the shed to the north. The door, as I vaguely recalled, was to the east, and I left her at the corner, concealed by the dense shadow, and crept cautiously forward alone, feeling along the rough boards for the latch. It opened noiselessly enough, but the darkness within was intense. So dim was my recollection of the place

that I was almost afraid to stir lest I might disturb something and create an alarm. In the silence I became aware of someone stirring not far away, and waited anxiously, seeking to locate the sound. In the silence I could distinguish heavy breathing, and then a noise which made me think of a body rolling on the floor. I stepped within, feeling with both hands and feet, but encountered nothing until I touched a work-bench against the opposite wall. As I stood there, facing about, staring into the black void, I could locate the breathing to my right.

"Who is here? answer!" I exclaimed, bending forward.

There was no reply, only a recurrence of struggle, and, after a moment of indecision, I felt my way along the bench, and came in contact with the figure of a man lying on the floor. Again I spoke sternly, gripping his shoulder in my fingers, but received no reply. Suspecting that, whoever the fellow might be, he was gagged and helpless, for my hand already discovered a strand of rope about his arm, I felt for his face. There was a cloth in his mouth, bound tightly into place by a handkerchief knotted behind his head.

Whoever the man might be, he was evidently no ally of Brandt's to receive such treatment, and I slashed the linen with the aid of his pocket knife. He gasped painfully, gulping down great draughts of air.

"Who are you?"

"De Vigne," he gasped. "Is this you, Monsieur?"

"Yes—here let me cut these ropes first of all. I understand what has happened without explanation at present. How long have you been lying here?"

"Maybe fifteen minutes, but it seems longer; I cannot tell. There was a fight."

"Of course. The fellows found you asleep?"

"Yes, Monsieur. There was a watch outside, and I did not expect trouble. Ramon was away, and I sat up late waiting for him to return. Then I became sleepy and lay down, perhaps about midnight. But first I went out, and saw the guard was all right. There were no orders, Monsieur, for me to remain on watch."

"I do not blame you, De Vigne; the happenings of this night could not have been anticipated by any of us. Can you sit up? Good; now rise to

your feet, and exercise your limbs a little. Don't make any noise. How are you? all right?"

"Only a little stiff, Monsieur, and my head hurts where I was clubbed. I don't remember what happened after that blow, until I woke up in here."

"Do you know how many attacked you?"

"There were four, Monsieur—one big fellow who spoke in German, but did not touch me; he just gave orders. One man had a cap on like a chauffeur, a leather cap; he was short, but strong like a bull; he had my throat like this, Monsieur, and it hurt me to breathe; and the man who hit me was the guard—I knew his face."

"There was a light then?"

"Always; it burn all night long."

"I could see none from outside when I came up. Have those men gone?"

"No, Monsieur; I heard voices just before you came—in there, not far from the door. Maybe they put out the light, so it will not be seen. The big man he carry an electric bulb—perhaps they use that. You know them, Monsieur? You know why they come here?"

"Do I, De Vigne! They have led me a merry

chase since yesterday, but we have broken even so far. The big man is named Brandt, a member of the German Secret Service."

"Captain Brandt, Monsieur?"

"You have heard of him then? Yes, that 's the fellow; the others are fellows in his pay. You can guess what they are after."

"The monoplane; the secret of the engine, Monsieur. *Sacre,* yes!"

"And that they are in earnest about it—even to murder."

"You mean they kill?"

"I mean they have killed. Ramon is dead; I saw his body."

"Mon Dieu! Why they not kill me?"

"Probably they did not intend killing him. He was tied as you were, but was drunk, and may have suffocated. These men know he is dead, however, and realize the desperate situation they are in. They will not hesitate now at any crime to attain their purpose and escape. They even sought to have me arrested for the murder."

"You, Monsieur?"

"Yes; I want you to understand the exact sit-

uation. I am here fleeing from the police, under charges concocted by Brandt to save himself. He believes I am hidden somewhere, waiting a chance to get out of the city. That is why he came here with his gang, knowing you were alone. It looked easy, for the watchman was in his pay, Ramon dead, and I fleeing from the police. You were all he had left to oppose him. Now he has got you, he will feel safe, and grow careless. The fact that he did not even have a man stationed outside, or left to guard the auto, proves how confident he is. He never dreams that I dare come here."

De Vigne breathed heavily, and swore.

"You would fight, Monsieur?"

"Yes, two against four; not such bad odds, with the surprise in our favor. You like that?"

"It will be good sport," and the soldier rubbed his hands together. "When we begin?"

"Presently; there is a bit to do first. Is the monoplane ready to fly?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"Plenty of gasoline? Provisions packed away? Oiled and tested?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur. Yesterday I saw to it all."

"And the ground in front—is it level and smooth? Have you been over it?"

"It is as a board, Monsieur, maybe four hundred feet—yes," with enthusiasm. "They play ze game baseball here, and it all hard like rock. The wheels run fine."

"Good enough. That was the way I recalled it. Now listen. We have n't got much time before daylight. As soon as we locate those fellows we will go for them swift and hard. Have you a revolver?"

"There is one in the drawer behind you, Monsieur."

"Put it in your pocket; I have one of my own. Now remember this—there is to be no killing, no shooting, if it can be possibly avoided. The more quietly we can accomplish this business the better. What I want to do is to drive the whole four back into that southwest corner, and make them prisoners. You get the idea?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"If we get between them and the front, there is no way for them to get out, unless they rush us. They are probably armed, but if we get the drop on them first, I do not think they will

fight. Brandt is the dangerous one—you leave him to me, and keep your gun on the others. Beyond that, obey orders."

He stood very straight in the dark, and his hand came up in salute.

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"As soon as they are secured we will run out the machine; if we cannot do it ourselves, we will compel that Pinkerton man to help."

"You will fly? now, in the dark?"

"Yes; it is the only way I can prevent being arrested, as the police watch all railway stations; and if I take the machine away Brandt cannot study its mechanism."

"And I go with you?"

"No, De Vigne, I have a passenger. You remain here; release the prisoners as soon as it is daylight. Then go direct to the French Consul, and make a report. He will tell you what to do."

He stood silent, shaking his head, clearly dissatisfied.

"You are a soldier?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"Then do as I say. I cannot take you; there

is a lady here who will make the trip with me."

"A lady, Monsieur!" the surprise in his voice making me smile.

"Exactly; she is outside now, and I am going to bring her in here. Do not forget again, De Vigne, that you are under my orders."

"*Non,* Monsieur."

"Very good; now stand where you are until I come back."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK

I FOUND her without difficulty, and hastily whispered into her ear the story of my meeting with De Vigne. In response she said there were men in the big shed; she had seen gleams of light showing through the crack of the big door, and had even crept up close enough to hear movement within. Once the muffled sound of a voice reached her ears, and, although it was impossible to distinguish words, she was convinced the language employed was German.

"You have seen no one outside?" I asked, "no sign of any guard?"

"No; I have told you all. Is it not strange they should be so reckless?"

"Brandt believes I am frightened away by the police. He thinks my only present purpose is to escape arrest, and it has never occurred to him that I might utilize the monoplane. He is

not an aeronaut, and will not understand the possibility. I am the only person they have any cause to fear now that Ramon is dead and De Vigne a prisoner. Come with me inside."

She accompanied me without hesitancy into the blackness of the shed, but I kept my hand on her arm, guiding her across until we reached the work-bench at the opposite side. Dark as it was without, yet the open door gave us a bit of starlight to relieve the gloom.

"Where are you, De Vigne?" I questioned, in a whisper, unable to distinguish his form.

"Here, Monsieur, waiting your orders."

"Your revolver; it is loaded?"

"Yes."

"And the door into the hangar; how is it secured?"

"With a wooden latch, Monsieur; it can be opened without noise."

"Very good; now, Mademoiselle, you will remain here, in this corner, where the work-bench will protect you until I come back. You will obey?"

"Surely yes," she answered. "I have promised."

"I know, and trust you. There may be a fight, but we shall have the advantage. All I ask is, do not expose yourself."

"But, Monsieur, what about yourself? Think what it would mean to me if you were hurt—who can tell how badly."

"I will be as careful as I can," I answered stoutly, "but this is a risk not to be avoided. I only wish you were not concerned in it."

"And I am glad I am. There must be a strain of wild blood in me, Monsieur, to rejoice at adventure. I even wish I could go with you."

"Yet you will not attempt such a mad freak? You will remain here?"

"I will keep my promise; you may trust me."

She was at the end of the bench, a mere black shadow, although our forms touched. As she whispered these words I could feel her breath on my cheek. My veins throbbed with a wild rush of blood, and, before I realized what I was doing, I had her in my arms, and found her lips with my own. An instant, helpless from surprise, she remained inert, then freed herself, pressing me back.

"Monsieur!" indignantly. "What right—"

"None; I implore pardon. The temptation was too much. You will forgive?"

"But you frighten me! You are not fair, Monsieur," she protested, holding herself away. "I—I cannot go with you now! I—I will not."

"But I meant nothing; it was only the impulse of an instant; cannot you understand?"

"It is because I understand that I resolve," she said firmly. "Had you respected me you would not have dared. I cannot trust you, Monsieur."

"You mean you will not go?"

She hesitated, and I waited, breathing hard, thoroughly ashamed of myself.

"Tell me, Mademoiselle? It was not what you think—I love you!"

"How easily you say that; they must be familiar words."

Her tone angered me, and I grasped her hand.

"Do not laugh," I whispered swiftly, "for I am not in that mood. I have told you no lie, paid you no idle compliment. Those words were forced from me; I spoke them in self-defense. Will you not believe me to be in earnest?"

"Oh, yes! You are in earnest—now. It is tomorrow I must consider—the many tomorrows. Please let me go, Monsieur. I promise to remain here."

"But not to take the flight."

"No; you have broken your pledge."

"I thought you cared."

"I did, Monsieur; I do still. I want you to get away safely, and to keep your secret from those men. I led you into all this trouble, and will do all in my power to help you. That is all; you must remain satisfied with that. You have no right to expect more."

"Then my love is nothing to you?"

"It might be everything, and yet not justify my yielding to your request. I am an American, not a French girl, and I have my code. You have made it impossible for me to go further."

"Monsieur," spoke De Vigne from the other side, "they have a light now; should we not hurry?"

"Yes; in a minute," and I turned back to her. "I must go now, but shall come back here. Will I find you?"

"Yes; I—I am not indifferent, not angry. It —it is all deeper than that. Only, please go now, and do not plead any more. This is too serious for words."

She gave me both her hands, and I lifted them to my lips. Then she drew them gently away, and stood erect. Someone struck a blow in the hangar, and I stepped back listening. I felt the necessity for action.

"The fight first," I said shortly, "and then you, my lady."

I felt my way along the edge of the bench to the door. De Vigne stood there, his eyes at a crack, through which a narrow gleam of light stole, but drew back at my approach. I felt for the wooden latch, and found it.

"Ready?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"Then do exactly as I do."

I lifted the latch silently, and opened the door just far enough so as to look into the interior. The light was a dim one near the farther extremity of the shed, obscured by the frame of the monoplane. Against the faint radiance I could trace the spreading wings of the machine,

and the network of wires. Just beyond the propeller the men were grouped, one fellow holding the electric lamp, the others crowding about, in an endeavor to see what the light revealed. Intent upon the one thing sought all else was forgotten, and their voices rumbled in German. I could not see the face of the fellow who held the lamp, but Eisenbarth stood at his right, holding back a piece of canvas with which the propeller had been wrapped, while Brandt had his back to us, and was leaning forward, one hand on the steel rod. The fourth man appeared indistinct beneath the shadow of an aerofoil intently listening to the conversation.

Assured that their attention was concentrated elsewhere, I slipped in through the narrow opening, stooping under the wing wires, until I found a secure hiding place behind the rudder. De Vigne followed me like a shadow, without making the slightest noise, and we crouched down together beyond the radius of light. Anxious as I was by this time to come to hand grips with the fellows, before daylight could thwart my plans of escape, I yet desired to learn what it really was they were so determined to dis-

cover, and to be certain of success before commencing attack. We were two against four, and the first blow struck would likely decide the battle. The very knowledge that Mademoiselle waited alone in the shed robbed me of recklessness, for I realized what our defeat would necessarily mean to her. The secret of the monoplane had become of small value, now it was being tested against her safety. I determined to protect her at any cost. It was Brandt's voice I distinguished first in a low, half-inarticulate growl.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, lifting his head. "Same propeller as in the Morane, is n't it?"

"Heavier, that 's all," returned Eisenbarth slowly. "Only difference I see is in the motor, and the ailerons."

"You mean those things they balance with? The wing tips?"

"Sure; they look as if they 'd work all right, but it 's the motor that gets me. I 'd have to try that out to discover what it would do."

"Wherein does it differ from others?"

The chauffeur moved back, motioning the man

with the lamp to follow, and the four disappeared from our direct view.

"In several ways, Captain," he said, at last, evidently demonstrating. "This is an improvement on the Gnome revolving engine. It is lighter, and fully as powerful, and is water-cooled. This is a combination never achieved before to my knowledge. I can grasp all this just as it stands, for the mechanics are simple enough, but this contrivance in connection with the exhaust is a new invention. I should have to test its work to learn its exact purpose."

"But you must have some theory?"

"Well, yes; it is undoubtedly intended as a silencer, and, if it does the business, will revolutionize the aeroplane for use in war. That is just what this machine has been reported to do, is n't it?"

"Yes; but no one believed it true. And you say this is the thing?"

"It must be. Seems simple enough, but I could n't figure out just how it works unless I took it apart, or else tried it in action."

I saw Brandt straighten up, and glance about into the darkness.

"Why not set the engine going?" he asked. "It 's all ready, is n't it?"

"Yes, but there is a risk that the silencer may not be properly adjusted, and the noise create an alarm."

"But there is no one about to hear; if there were it would only be supposed that Dessaud's mechanics were trying it out. Go on, and see how the thing works; if it makes too much racket shut it off."

Eisenbarth, still wearing his long chauffeur gloves, came around behind the man with the lamp, fumbled a moment, grumbling to himself, and then climbed up into the operating seat. The others drew back.

"Here you, bring that light this way," he ordered gruffly. "It is all done by the feet, and I can't see the connections."

The man thrust the lamp in through the light framework, the gleam concentrated on the footboard, leaving all else shrouded in darkness. I could see Eisenbarth's face as though in a spotlight, as he bent forward studying the mechanism, before venturing to turn on the power. With my knowledge of the peculiar arrange-

ment I had to smile at his bewilderment, yet dared delay no longer. Mechanic though he was —an expert possibly, employed for this very purpose—yet he might decide wrong, and by a single movement wreck the delicate machinery. Too much depended on all being right for me to risk his handling of throttle and lever. I gripped De Vigne's arm, and we both arose to our feet.

"Now," I whispered, "you take the left, and I will go the other way. Leave the big fellow to me, but cover that man up above. I don't think there is much fight in the other two; you understand?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur—I am not to fire?"

"Only as a last resort, to save our lives. Some of those fellows are probably armed. Don't let them draw. Brandt will make the most trouble, but I 'll take care of him."

"I do just as you say."

"Then listen; get as near as you can without being seen; creep up under the propeller. Attack as soon as I cover Brandt, and not before. Make that fellow climb down, and, if it comes to blows, use the butt of your gun. Drive them

all back into that corner. Don't forget to hit first. Are you ready?"

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

We separated, and stole forward, crouching in the black shadows, each gripping his revolver with nervous fingers. We might fail; I realized that, but only as a dim possibility, for I felt a grim determination which assured me of success. The night's adventures had left me on edge; little by little there had grown up in my heart a hatred for these men, and a desire for vengeance. The prospect of a fight was almost joyful; I longed to strike, and hear the crunch of the blow. The defense of my machine was no longer the dominant factor; nor even the defense of the girl. The struggle had become personal. Those fellows had hounded me for hours, had beaten me cruelly, and held me captive. They had been brutes, stooping even to murder to accomplish their end. The same spirit had come into my own blood. I hoped they would fight; I longed for an excuse to do them physical injury, to batter them, to even kill if necessary. I experienced no sense of fear, only the exhilaration of battle, yet I think my brain was

never clearer, or my judgment cooler, than in that moment. I had the advantage now, and meant to hold it. I knew what I desired to accomplish, and how.

I approached Brandt from the rear, seeing his burly figure clearly outlined against the light. Before he even sensed danger I had my fingers gripped in his collar, the barrel of my revolver between his eyes. As he whirled about, jerked erect by my arm, he caught sight of my face in the gleam, and, for an instant, stared at me, dazed and inert. Then there flashed into his eyes malignant recognition.

"You! Dessaud! how did you get here?"

"We will discuss that later. Not a movement now! Come; hands up, and back away!"

He did as I ordered, mechanically, forced by the black muzzle, yet watching me like a hawk, ready to spring. Across his shoulder, but without removing my eyes from him, I caught glimpses of the others. Attracted by my attack on their leader the three men, seeking to discover the cause of disturbance, had been hopelessly trapped. De Vigne, grinning pleasantly, held them under two revolvers—though

where he got the second weapon I never knew—the deadly barrels glinting in the light. I saw the chauffeur drop to the floor, still clinging to a wire with one hand, the other flung up as though to ward a blow. Swigert leaped back, but was held helpless against the framework of the machine, his face ghastly in the light; while the fellow with the lamp straightened up, staring with startled eyes at the apparition confronting him. It was all the revelation of an instant—a swift flash of sight to be retained by memory, yet as quickly blotted. Even as it photographed itself upon the brain, the electric glow vanished, and we were plunged into the dark. There was an oath—gutteral, German—the thud of a blow; another, a French exclamation of anger, and then Brandt, suddenly realizing his opportunity, swung me half around in an effort to wrench free. I hung on desperately, saved from a fall by contact with the rudder post, feeling him claw for my throat. Someone ran by us blindly in the darkness, crashed into a rear guy, and fell headlong, yelping like a dog as he came down. I ducked forward, beneath the groping hands, and struck Brandt with my

head. As he staggered back, with one hand grabbing my hair in an effort to save himself, I struck with my revolver butt. The blind blow reached him; I heard the sickening crunch of it, and the fellow went down as though smitten by an ax, dragging me with him by his savage grip on my hair. I fell partly across his body, the gun dropping from my fingers as I sought to regain hold on the man's throat. But he never moved except for a relaxation of the muscles, and I tore his hand loose from its grasp on my hair, and got to my knees. Someone was fighting to my left; I could see nothing, but heard blows, cursing, and the incessant shuffle of feet. It sounded as though more than two were engaged, but there was no voice I recognized. Then a body fell, plunging completely over me, and I lit a match, holding the tiny flame high up so as to get a glimpse of the scene.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE FIGHT ENDED

THE flare lit up a very small radius, yet revealed two men locked tightly in each other's arms beneath the fusilage frame, fighting like wild cats, shaking the machine above them as their bodies struck the forward wheels. De Vigne was beneath, his face bleeding from what looked to be an ugly cut. By his cap I judged his antagonist to be the chauffeur. Swigert was the fellow who had plunged over me, and now lay motionless, having cracked his head against the after frame. Of the fourth man I saw nothing.

The match flared into cinder, scorching my fingers, but I had seen enough. Stumbling forward, recklessly feeling my way through the dark, I gripped Eisenbarth, and dragged him from off his victim, whirling the fellow over, and jamming my knee down into his breast.

"Lie still, you fool!" I commanded, the words

panting from me. "Strike at me again, and you 'll remember it! Very well—take that then! Now do you know you are whipped? De Vigne."

"*Oui,* Monsieur," the response scarcely more than a sob.

"Are you badly hurt? Can you creep around?"

He did not reply at once, but I could hear him making the effort to move. From the shaking of the monoplane I judged he had grasped hold of the frame, and was attempting by its aid to attain his feet. Once he swore as though the effort pained him.

"Well, are you making it?"

"It was all right, Monsieur, only the head reel, an' I feel sick. The fellow kick me in the stomach. What you want me to do?"

"Find that electric lamp. It will be lying under the machine there somewhere. We must have light to clean up this raffle, and I cannot desert our friend here."

He fumbled around for some time, breathing heavily, and occasionally giving vent to some exclamation.

"Here was a revolver, Monsieur."

"Hold on to it. You don't feel the lamp?"

"Not yet, Monsieur, but it must be somewhere about here. It is what I was struck with, and it fell down; maybe we kicked it farther away. Ah!" in sudden triumph, "I have it now; how you work it, Monsieur?"

"By a press-button; feel along the side with your finger."

He was a while finding it, yet finally succeeded, the thin wedge of light flashing directly across the face of the man beneath me, and revealing the skeleton frame of the monoplane overhead. The second revolver lay on the floor within easy reach, and I picked it up, and arose to my feet. Gasping for breath, but with all desire to fight squeezed completely out of him, Eisenbarth succeeded in lifting himself on one elbow, and stared about.

"Sure you have had enough?" I asked, juggling the pistol in my hand. He nodded sullenly.

"Is that Brandt lying over there?"

"Yes; throw your light more around the hangar, De Vigne; I want to locate the whole gang."

He turned about slowly, and the bar of light crept searchingly along the floor and walls. Brandt lay flat on his back, his temples stained with blood, his hands flung backward over his head; beyond him, lying prone on his face, rested Swigert, groaning, and clutching at the smooth rudder. He was probably only stunned by his fall, but the big German had all the appearance of a dead man. My eyes followed the light searching for the fourth scamp—he was at the door leading into the workshop, still tugging at the latch, but with frightened face turned back toward us. We had left the door open; I was certain of that. Then the girl must have closed it after us, and then held it from the other side. I felt my blood leap in acknowledgment of her quick wit, and courage. Instantly I covered the fellow with my revolver.

"Come back here! Yes, I mean you. More lively; hold the light so that I can see him, De Vigne."

He was a medium-sized man, with thin, freckled face, and red mustache.

"What 's your name?"

"Kelly, sor."

"Not a German, hey! Then how did you come to get mixed up in this affair?"

He looked at me shame-faced, and tried to answer, but could only swallow.

"Speak up, man! You are the fellow who held the light, ain't you?"

"Oi am, sor; th' big fellow thar' made me."

"Made you! by the promise of a ten dollar bill likely. Come, spit out the truth."

"He 's the watchman, Monsieur," broke in De Vigne. "The same who hit me with the lamp," feeling his head tenderly. "The bloody pirate; nobody ever made him do it."

"I am of the same opinion. Is there any rope around here, De Vigne?"

"Plenty in the workroom."

"Go and get it; give me the lamp. Now you two stay just where you are. Wait a minute, De Vigne; go through these fellows' pockets first."

He did the work expeditiously, but the only weapon found was a knife on Eisenbarth, which I flung into one corner. The Irishman wore a belt with a sheath, but his revolver had disappeared, probably dropped when he fell in his wild effort at escape. I flashed the light about

over the floor in a circle, but failed to perceive any sign of it. On a lapel of the man's vest was a detective's shield; De Vigne jerked it off, and stamped it with his heel.

"And I 'd like to do the same with you," he growled, shaking a fist in the fellow's face, "you Irish blackguard."

"Never mind that now," I broke in hastily. "Get the rope."

He came back with it, and Mademoiselle followed, picking her way cautiously through the maze, guided by the light. She appeared almost like a ghost in her gray dress, the gleam illumining her face as she advanced toward me beneath the spreading wings. Beside Brandt's body she stopped suddenly in horror, staring down at the ghastly upturned face.

"Is—is he dead, Monsieur?"

"I hope not, but have n't had time yet to find out. I struck him in the dark with a revolver butt, and he has n't moved since. It was either he or I, you know."

She lifted her eyes to my face.

"Yes, I know; I could hear the struggle. I did not mean to blame you, but—but I hope you

have n't killed him; that would be terrible for all of us. You were not hurt?"

"Oh, no," essaying a laugh, "my luck held, and I am fit to play out the game. Yes, tie the three, De Vigne, and do a good job. Begin with Eisenbarth here; he 's the biggest villain. Swigert yonder is getting up. Better remain where you are, my man—yes, I mean you. Never mind talking about it; we know the whole story. Now, Miss Probyn—"

I turned toward her, but she was already kneeling beside Brandt, holding one of his wrists in her hand. I stepped over beside them, but kept the light of the lamp turned on the others. She glanced up quickly.

"He is alive, Monsieur; there is plenty of pulse, very rapid, and the skull was not fractured I am sure."

"I am indeed thankful for that," I assured her. "I did not know how hard I struck, it all occurred so swiftly. The fellow, no doubt, deserves to be killed, but I feel no special bitterness toward him. Almost I am grateful."

"That is strange."

"Not at all; but for him I should never have

known you. That is the part of tonight I shall always prefer to remember."

"Your words are foolish, Monsieur."

"I refuse to admit the charge; instead they are quite rational. No, Mademoiselle, I will not remain still. Once you could control me, but now no longer. I read your eyes as you came in."

"My eyes! in the dark?"

"No, in the light; full in the glow of this electric lamp. It was because you thought them obscured that I saw what I saw."

"I cannot imagine, Monsieur—"

"Nor can you deny. I was the one you sought; I was the one in your thoughts. You looked at no one else; cared nothing how the others might have fared, until you were sure as to me. Is that not true?"

"What more natural? The others were either unknown, or enemies."

"You parry well, but I wield the stronger blade. Your eyes have laughed at, and played with me, all this night long. Not until then have I seen into their depths, surprised their secret. Just for that one instant you forgot, and gave

me glimpse of your heart. It is now, Mademoiselle, I hold you prisoner."

She arose to her feet, looking frankly at me, her hands clasped.

"I regret my eyes have unconsciously played me such a trick, Monsieur," she said soberly. "They have been guilty of treachery before, so you must not presume upon them. But is this a time to stop for such gallant speech? There are already signs of coming day in the sky, and that means hurry. Have n't you much to do?"

"It will not take long, unless those tinkerers have flung something out of gear. And I am going to trust to your eyes, Mademoiselle—not your words—your eyes. Never mind what I mean—you will learn all that soon enough. You held the door fast?"

"Yes; I stood there trying to see, and heard the man running. I did not know who he was, but thought you would want him stopped."

"The service was well rendered; his escape would have spoiled all. Now there is nothing left to be done, but get away. What is it, De Vigne?"

"I 've got the three all right over there," he

said, pointing toward a dark corner, but with his eyes on the girl. "I had to be rough with that chauffeur, Monsieur; the devil bit me—see," and he held up his hand which was bleeding.

"He is a vicious cur, fit to be associated with this kind of a leader," touching Brandt with my foot.

"Shall I tie him, too?"

"No; drag him back out of the way of the rudder, and let him lie there. He 'll come too all right if only let alone; his kind don't die easy, more the pity."

I stood aside as he lugged Brandt's heavy body out of the way, holding the lamp aloft. She remained close beside me, but without speaking, until De Vigne came back. I could see the contour of her face, clear cut as a cameo in the bright gleam, but her eyes were averted. The silhouette fascinated me, yet I was aroused now to the swift passage of time, and the very moment De Vigne dropped his burden, I flashed the light about upon the monoplane, anxious to learn its condition. My own resolve was made, but I must be certain we would run no unneces-

sary risk. The mechanic joined me, one hand grasping the frame.

"Did those fellows work any injury tinkering around?"

"Not unless they loosened something about the motor, Monsieur. The chauffeur had a small monkey wrench in his hand, but I don't think he found any chance to use it. Let me have the light, and I 'll see."

He was scarcely three minutes at it, for he knew every bolt and brace; then he took hasty survey of radiator, and propeller, flashing the sharp ray of light into each intricate part, and testing them with trained fingers. I watched his face anxiously, pleased to see it lit up with a smile, as he finally stepped back fully satisfied with his scrutiny.

"Fine as a watch, Monsieur," he reported proudly.

"Ready for flight at this minute?"

"Everything—yes," and he gesticulated with both hands. "Those were your orders yesterday, Monsieur. You were to try it this morning if the weather was by chance clear. So it was I looked over the machinery, while Ramon

saw to the supplies. It is well, perfect; I took great care."

"Gasoline, oil, tool hamper, water, food?"

I ran over the various items swiftly, in spite of his former assurances.

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"And you tested the gear carefully? the levers, chains and wires?"

"All, Monsieur; twice yesterday, and again last night when I oiled."

"Can you start the machine off alone?"

"You mean run it out? I do not know, Monsieur, for I have never tried. Perhaps I could for I am sure there are no depressions in the ground even as I said, and the vacant space is perhaps four hundred feet."

"But we cannot run any chances and shall have to use one of our prisoners to help you; release the Pinkerton man, he is the safer, and bring him here."

He disappeared, returning scarcely a moment later, gripping the fellow firmly by the collar, and thrusting him forward into the light of the lamp.

"Kelly," I said sternly, "pay strict attention

to what I say. You don't care anything for this gang of outlaws. You 're with them because you thought you saw a chance for a little easy money. That 's the truth, is n't it?"

He grinned, yet not altogether with good humor, but held silent.

"I thought so. Now my money is just as good as theirs. This night's work is going to cost you your job likely, and a little additional cash, together with a chance to get away safely, is worth considering."

"It was, sor."

"Sensible decision, Kelly. You are going to help run this machine out of the hangar, and give it a start for flying. De Vigne here will tell you exactly what to do, and he 'll put a bullet in you if you don't do it. If you play fair he 'll give you this roll of bills, and turn you loose as soon as we are off. Do you agree to this?"

"Wid all me heart, sor."

De Vigne thrust the roll displayed into his own pocket, taking care to flourish a revolver as he did so, and the eyes of the Irishman blinked in the light as I watched him narrowly. He was a treacherous scoundrel, but he could not

afford to play us false. However it might be well to make him realize what his chances were. I laid a hand on De Vigne's shoulder.

"Now, Kelly, mark my words. This is a case of either life or death with you. This man here is a soldier, under my orders. He will do exactly as I tell him. If you try to run, or show any sign of treachery, he 'll shoot you down as he would a dog. You understand that?"

The man's shifting eyes were upon the girl, but in the silence, they left her face and sought mine.

"Oi do sor; sure an' Oi 'm no crazy fool. Whut fer would oi' be tryin' ter skip out?" He spat on the ground contemptuously. "Ter hell wid the Dutch."

I could not but notice the expression of disgust on Miss Probyn's face.

"Then we are ready. De Vigne, bring the coats and caps here—my own, and the suit for the lady."

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"But," she gasped, stepping forward and clasping my arm. "You forget! I—I said I would not—"

"And did you ever suppose I would abide by that decision?" I interrupted, meeting her gaze fairly. "That I would leave you here, and depart alone? Do you not know me better than that?"

"I fear I do not know you at all. Do you actually mean you will force me to go?"

"No, Mademoiselle; only to make a choice. We either both go, or we both stay; the decision is entirely your own. Here is De Vigne now, with the suits. Will you accept yours?" and I held the garment out toward her.

There was a moment of silence, her eyes resting on mine, her breath coming quickly. I know there was both firmness and pleading in my face, but what else it may have also revealed to her questioning gaze I cannot tell. It seemed to me a long while before she moved, as though my heart had actually stopped beating in fear of her decision. Then her eyes sank, shaded by long lashes, and she held out her hands.

CHAPTER XX

"ON UPWARD WINGS"

WITHOUT a word, but with pulse throbbing madly, I helped her don the long coat, and fastened it securely about the neck. She endeavored to button the lower flap, but her trembling fingers made of it quite a task.

"You are surely not afraid," I whispered, aiding her. "I cannot believe that."

"No, not of the flight," and she glanced at me reproachfully. "I—I am nervous, that is all; I—I thought I could refuse you, but—but I cannot. You are forcing me to do wrong."

Perhaps I was too happy over my victory; at least I felt no inclination toward mercy, for down in my heart I believed she was glad at my insistence, and that I was fully justified.

"You are going to learn better, Mademoiselle," I said gravely, and drew the cap down over her hair, fastening it firmly. "I have

no thought now but for your welfare. Trust me, and give me your hand in evidence."

She permitted me to take it in my own, but there was no responsive clasp. At last she looked up.

"I do trust you; I must, and—and I believe you think this is right. But let us not talk about it any longer! I have consented; I am going just as you wish. Please do not argue any more."

Realizing what she meant, and fearing lest her resolution might give way under further strain, I guided her back to the skeleton body of the machine.

"Throw your light here, De Vigne, so the lady can see," I ordered. "Now, Mademoiselle, place your foot on this cross-piece; now on the other. Yes, that is right, you can support yourself with the guy-wire. This is the hardest part —getting on board. There is only one step more; take the seat to the left; now you are all right. Wrap your coat tightly about your knees, and press the edge down under your feet so the wind cannot get underneath; the air will be chill outside."

I struggled into my own coat, and pulled on my gloves, looking up to where she was perched, her face plainly visible in the light.

"You are comfortable?" I asked, feeling my voice would encourage.

"Yes, but are you not coming?"

"In a moment; there are a few things to be attended to below first. You better put on your gloves; they are in the coat pocket. Now, De Vigne, douse that light, and we 'll throw open the doors. Kelly, take hold here."

They were heavy enough to require the strength of all three of us to roll them back, yet made little noise. The cool night air poured in through the wide opening, and there was a dull gray haze visible along the eastern sky, the first faint glimmer of approaching dawn. The stars were paling, and there was already sufficient reflection of light so as to reveal a row of houses between us and the horizon, although the wide field in our front remained dark with shadow. I endeavored to study the surface, but could see clearly only for a few feet, yet the depth of open space was amply sufficient, and the land appeared level, and reasonably smooth. But

for my passenger I should have felt no restraint, but with her still in mind, I walked forward a hundred feet, perhaps, testing the ground for possible pitfalls, and returned satisfied. The two men lingered at the door, De Vigne testing the propeller.

"Now, boys, get in here, and roll her out. Take hold of the frame opposite me, Kelly. Carefully now, so as not to jar things going over the sill. Hold tight to both arms of your seat, Mademoiselle; now all together—easy there! a little more to the right, De Vigne. She clears; that is enough."

We were safely outside, the sky above dark but clearing, the pale stars still gleaming fitfully, the only sound recognizable the rattle of a far-off street car. Behind us was the black shadow of the hangar, its wide door yawning, and the monoplane, with light framework, delicate tracery of wires, and wide-spread wings resting there on spindle wheels, in that spectral light, appeared phantom-like and unreal. I laid hand on it almost dreaming, as I gazed up at the girl's indistinct form perched in the seat above. I could not see her face, yet knew she

would be staring down at us in anxious fear lest something occur to send her away alone.

"So far so good," I said cheerily, to hearten her. "Now, Kelly, you do exactly as De Vigne says—nothing more, or less. You understand what you are to do afterward, De Vigne."

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

"There is to be no talking, only to the consul."

"*Oui,* Monsieur."

I shook hands with him, and climbed up through the light framework to my seat at the right, fastening the strap across my body, and then leaning over and securely buckling hers. De Vigne was already at the propeller prepared to set its blades in motion, and I took time to touch her gloved hand with my own, observant to the whiteness of her face beneath the shade of the cap visor.

"Do—do you always strap yourself in like this?" she asked. "Is there danger of falling?"

"There are 'pockets' in the air," I explained, "and occasionally the drop is considerable. It is safer, that is all, and permits freer use of the hands. You will not mind at all after we once

get away from the earth. This is the greatest sport in the world; you are going to like it."

Whatever she answered was lost in the sudden whirl of the propeller, and then I heard De Vigne's voice:

"Ready, Monsieur?"

I straightened up, my feet firm on the levers, hands gripping the wheel, every nerve tense, my eyes on the dim glow of light ahead. This was the real test, the next few moments, and I must be alert, prepared to meet any emergency. After we once took the air, and had safely cleared that row of houses, I could afford to think of other things, but not now.

"Yes, all right—let her go!"

I felt the swift leap of the delicate framework under us; the throb of the motor, silent, but no less powerful, thrilling through the taut wires; the jar of the rubber-tired wheels as they gripped the earth. I heard De Vigne shouting orders to his companion, the increasing hum of the more rapidly revolving propeller blade; the slight creaking of the wings. Then we seemed to leap from off the ground, careening slightly, but as instantly straightening as I touched the

controlling lever, and headed away into the gray east. I was cool enough now, while feeling all the exhilaration of the moment. The dark earth shadow slipped away beneath, seeming rather to fall from us; there was no sensation of flight, except for the rush of cold air against our faces, or a swift leap of the blood, when the machine swerved slightly as it mounted steadily higher. One of the men below cried out something, but the words were indistinguishable; looking down I could perceive nothing except black shadows, distorted and grotesque. The whirl of the propeller became less noticeable, and the motor worked almost noiselessly, emitting just enough sound to assure me it was in powerful action. We cleared the row of houses by a hundred feet, ever mounting higher into the gloomy, gray sky. In front of us now, a grim, magnificent picture in the wan light of the early dawn, spread the waters of the lake. I could perceive bursts of white where waves dashed against the breakwater, and beyond a gray shimmer, disappearing into mist. Below, on land, it was yet night, and the myriads of street lamps blazed gorgeously through the

gloom, marking the vast extent of the city. Far away to the left the lighthouse on a distant pier shot forth rays of alternating white and red into the enveloping haze. It was a fairy picture of neither night nor day, full of spectral shadows, and the gleam of strange lights, blending into the ghastly gray of the dawning, with the somber waters dashing against the shore, and the earth a shapeless gloom, yet aglow with color. Just beneath us an engine passed, a burst of red flame showing through the open furnace door, painting a weird picture on the black screen for an instant, and as quickly blotted. Noises unrecognizable, rose to us out of the dark void, blending into a dull roar, which grew fainter as we swept onward, out over the silent water.

From the height we had now attained we could perceive a faint tinge of red far to the eastward, with purple streamers piercing the low-hanging mist which still obscured the horizon. Beneath this upper light the fog floated, a dun-colored cloud, its higher undulating waves violet tinted, and assuming fanciful shapes. With careful pressure I brought the monoplane to a straight course, and took a long, sweeping turn toward

the left, gradually opening the engine throttle. The dim light failed to reveal the figures of the register, but there was no necessity for reading these to know that we were traveling at high speed. The mad whirl of the propeller, the swift chug of the almost noiseless motor, the sweep of wind lashing against our faces, and singing through the taut wires, the quick response of the delicate machine to the slightest deviation of the rudder, the trembling of the light framework, all combined to tell the story. I felt to the full the deep exhilaration of rapid movement, the consciousness of power. This was indeed life, an experience wherein an hour was well worth a year of ordinary existence. We swept swiftly past the great city, blazing with lights along its water front, still sleeping in its night shadow, as though we were a wild bird breasting its way northward in search of solitude. We glimpsed the curving line of shore, the blacker outlines of piers, the dim tracery of vessels, still illumined by harbor lights; watching them all disappear as though some mysterious power had swept them from existence. Every instant, every throb of the motor,

brought with it a new vista, a fresh revelation, an unexpected marvel. We were on wing, buoyant, free, sweeping through the gray sky, the paling stars still visible in the west, the sweet morning air fresh on our faces. All that was sordid and mean had been left far below; about us, uncharted, a vast expanse, was the clear, pure atmosphere of the heights. We were alone in another world, isolated from our race, and all its hatred and strifes, the masters of a new realm, the bold navigators of a new sea.

Once, way down below, a tiny thing to our eyes as we swept breathlessly past, a vessel showed dimly, steaming southward, a great white passenger boat, no doubt, heading for the harbor. A glimpse, and we were gone. Once we encountered a "pocket," and glided down, swift as a falling arrow, until we saw the white-caps cresting the waves, only to mount again, like some frightened bird into the higher levels, our great wings swooping to the renewed pressure of air. Then I pointed our course into the northeast, my eyes on the compass screwed into the arm of my seat. The shore line disappeared, and we swept forward into the increasing mist,

now golden tinged all about us by the first penetrating rays of the sun, but below a dull gray cloud, hiding the distant waters. We were alone—alone; a mere atom, winging silent passage through the sky, in a world of our own.

For the first time I turned my head and looked at her, my heart throbbing to the sudden recollection of her presence. This was not all new to me; I had felt the rare exhilaration of such flight often before, but how would the strange experience appeal to her? Her silence, her strained attitude, the shapeless figure, muffled in the great coat, told nothing. I could see the contour of her face beneath the cap shadow, and it appeared white in the spectral glare, her eyes staring straight ahead into the gray smother. I touched the gloved hand, where it still grasped the arm of the seat, and she glanced around quickly, smiling bravely as her eyes met mine.

"You are not frightened then, Mademoiselle," I said, relieved instantly by their expression. "The height does not trouble you?"

"No," she answered, shading her mouth with one hand, so as to speak freely. "I—I do not seem to have had time; it has been so swift, so

unexpected, so marvelous. I hardly knew when we left the earth; there was no sensation whatever."

"You expected to be dizzy? to experience the same feeling as when gazing down from a great height?"

"Yes, of course! I could never bear that, and the very thought sickened me. But I have not felt so in the least; it has been more like a dream than a reality—only—only when we dropped back there; then I thought it was all over with."

"I confess to having been startled myself for a second," I replied frankly, "for I was afraid we were not high enough. We ran into a 'pocket,' where the air was too thin to yield sufficient support. This is one of the mysteries of the atmosphere not yet sufficiently understood to be guarded against. I am flying much higher now."

"How high?"

I glanced at the gauge.

"About fifteen hundred feet."

"And you know where you are going?"

"Only vaguely," and I drew out the map drawer below my seat, showing her the chart be-

neath the glass. "This all occurred so suddenly I had no time to study the matter out. You must know better than I where we can land safely. My thought was the Michigan shore; about here, perhaps, where there seems to be few towns," and I pointed to the spot.

"Why, that would take us entirely across the lake!"

"Well, what of it?" laughingly. "There is no more danger in flying above water than land, and we are already well on our way. Besides when the sun drives this mist aside, we are far less likely to be noticed by anyone below."

"But it seems more perilous," she insisted, staring down into the swirling cloud with wide-opened eyes. "Of course it is foolish, but it startles me to know there is nothing but water down there. I suppose that you feel differently, Monsieur."

"I have crossed the channel from France to England," I replied quietly, "in a less trustworthy machine by far; with one of my aerofoils mended by wire, and an engine that skipped its stroke. Now everything is working finely; listen to the steadiness of the motor, and note how

slight the jar of the frame—yet we are traveling at high speed."

"How fast, Monsieur?"

I bent forward and deciphered the indicator with difficulty, unwilling to guess at the rate.

"Sixty-three miles an hour; seventy is the best I have ever done with this motor. It is hard to talk, and explain against this rush of air, but we must be in midlake already. I think the mist is rising, and we shall soon be able to see what is beneath. I hope so," shivering, "for I am actually cold, and this gray, spectral light is depressing."

She did not answer, except to draw her coat tighter, shrinking back into her seat. I stared down into the folds of vapor, trying to assure myself they were actually thinning. All at once they seemed to roll aside, like two curtains drawn by invisible hands, and I could see through the slowly widening opening. The vista broadened, and I touched her arm again eagerly.

"Look there!" I said. "Is n't that sight worth the danger?"

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE AMONG THE CLOUDS

I WATCHED her bend forward and look down, so fascinated by the view thus suddenly revealed, as to be instantly forgetful of the great height at which we soared. In the clearer light her cheeks appeared flushed, and I marked the firm grip of her hands on the rail. Whatever of fear had partially unnerved her during our swift flight through the dark, had apparently vanished in the ecstasy of this supreme moment. She felt the thrill, the happiness of air mastery, the delight of conquering space, of looking down on the little earth as though she dwelt in a higher realm. Such joy is not the gift of all mortals—the weak, and craven of heart can never know it—but to this girl of courage and character, it belonged as an inheritance. I felt that I knew her before; now I rejoiced in the certainty of such knowledge, the words of love trembling on my lips. She glanced aside at me, her eyes glowing.

"It is indeed glorious, Monsieur!" she managed to exclaim against the rush of air. "It is as if God Himself was drawing aside those curtains of fog—see, away out yonder!"

I was myself enthralled by the spectacle gazing where she pointed through the widening rift, yet never forgetful of my duty, or of the frail craft under us. Often as I have flown among the clouds above the fair fields of France, never before did any scene unroll itself below me to equal that which was now revealed—so variegated, so combined of beauty and grandeur, so gorgeous in coloring. I could but gaze silently, reverently, my eyes wandering from object to object in the ever-changing panorama, hushed into speechlessness by awe of the sublimity of the vast scene. We were so little, so insignificant, hovering a mere speck in the sky, high above this marvelous transformation, this new revealment of nature. The very conception dazed the mind, even as it sent the hot blood leaping through the veins.

How can I reflect that picture to the imagination of others? I can see it yet, not in detail, but in stupendous whole, yet words are useless,

colorless, inane, as I seek them in the vocabulary of men. They do not picture, or reflect what the eye saw. Below were the misty clouds of early morning drifted slowly asunder, billowing like great waves of smoke as they swept to north and south, while through their fleecy whiteness shot the golden red rays of the sun. Through this widening rent in the curtain we gazed down onto the restless waters of Lake Michigan, blue and green, except for the creaming of crested waves, but in the distance sparkling with myriad colors as the morning light played across their surface, tingeing it with crimson and gold, silver and purple, melting away finally into dull gray. This riot of tints intermingled in dazzling profusion, fading out, or brightening with every instant, yet ever circling to a wider horizon. Not for a moment did they appear the same. Here and there in that wide expanse of sea were vessels—mere toy boats at that distance—some of them shapeless blots on the dazzling surface, others outlined in clear perspective, with even their tapering masts silhouetted in the bright light, and volumes of black smoke hanging in clouds above

their stacks. To north and south and west all was water, restless, heaving, churned into crested waves by some wind of the past night which had ceased with the dawn. But to the east stretched a far-away shore-line, a blotch of dark blue, so dimly revealed as to be shapeless; something to be imagined rather than seen. Above all we flew, cleaving the air like some gigantic bird, our propeller whirling with steady insistence, the motor barely audible above the rush of the wind, the great rudder astern moving gently to the pressure of my foot, and the widespread wings motionless. Strapped securely to our seats, awed by the wondrous spectacle thus outspread beneath, all fear banished, we stared down through the silence, unable to find words worthy of utterance. I recall clasping her unresisting hand in mine, and saw the sudden questioning glance of her eyes as she lifted her head to gaze aside at me, but neither spoke. I know not how long it was we sat there, but slowly the glow of light, with all its kaleidoscopic colors, blended into a yellow sheen, as though the sea was gold, and the swift flight of the monoplane

had so reduced the distance that my eyes could detect the irregularities of the Michigan shore, could even distinguish the glint of sand, the dark outline of trees fringing the edge of the bluff. With perfect control I "banked" the machine in wide curve, slowing the motor for safety, and headed due north, skirting the shore too far out to be easily seen, yet sufficiently close so as to enable us to study its formation. Slightly ahead was an indentation, and outjutting piers, on one of which stood a light-house, dazzling white. Beyond, under the shadow of the bluff, appeared the belching smoke stacks of a city. Half concealed by the friendly folds of a gray cloud we swept past, the motor increasing its silent stroke, as I gave it more power. Through the cloud rifts, as soon as the monoplane had settled on its new course, I pointed out the distant town to her.

"What city is it? Do you know, Monsieur?" her voice a silver thread of sound.

"I can only guess by reference to the map and indicator," I replied, "for I know nothing of these shores. I hoped you might recognize something familiar. You have crossed the lake?"

"Often, but it all looks strange from up here." She gazed earnestly at the swiftly vanishing harbor. "It is not Grand Haven I am sure; the long pier and lighthouse remind me of Muskegon, and that deep indentation in the coast; yet surely we cannot have traveled so far?"

"How far?"

"More than a hundred miles as I remember. It may be more."

I laughed, with my eyes on the speed indicator.

"Then it is not so impossible. You do not realize our speed, because there are no motionless objects along the way. The sting of the air alone gives us the sense of motion, and we have been flying with the wind. Can you see the gauge, Mademoiselle? No! Well it registers a trifle over sixty miles, and we have been in the air two hours, flying steadily, with scarcely a variation of the compass. The only time I have been compelled to slow down was when we took the dip, and were obliged to circle upward. The delay then was very brief. It would be my impression the town yonder was Muskegon; at least I have determined to act upon that belief."

She turned and faced me, sitting back in her seat.

"You think of going ashore? of landing? Is that it, Monsieur?"

"From my map there is no better place, or one where we are less likely to be observed. See, Mademoiselle—here is what you call a county; am I not right? named Oceana. There are woods here all along the shore, with only a few small towns farther back on a railroad that runs south to Muskegon. But there are clearings in behind the bluffs where we can come down in safety. Who will know? maybe a few farmers. They will suspect nothing, and, for a few dollars, will help store away the monoplane."

"But they will hear; the story will be in the papers."

"No; why should it? you are a reporter—yes; but no other knows, and for that reason I am safe."

"You brought me along for that? to stifle the press?"

"Let us imagine so. It is the result I would consider. We have disappeared; no one knows how except Brandt, and those other men we left

at the hangar. Brandt dare not tell, and may be trusted to hush his men. Their only desire will be to keep out of sight while the police investigate the death of Ramon. Moreover there are two great nations anxious to have this affair kept secret—Germany and France. De Vigne will explain to my Consul, and Brandt will report to his Ambassador. Both, no doubt, know the truth, already, and have blocked all inquiry."

"But, Monsieur, you forget Schmitt, and the police?"

"The one dare not tell, and the other possesses only a suspicion; with the disappearance of Brandt they will have no witness. I know how these affairs are kept dark in Europe, Mademoiselle, and, without doubt the same methods are pursued here in America when occasion arises. If we had actually been placed under arrest, the detention would have been only temporary."

"The witnesses would have disappeared?"

"Yes; and other means resorted to effectually to hush the matter up. Brandt called in the police for two reasons—to divert suspicion from himself, and to get me safely out of his way. But

he is too shrewd a rascal to ever permit a trial —to do so would uncover the whole spy system of Europe."

"Then you are not afraid, Monsieur? You knew the arrest was all a bluff? that you could have taken a train from the city?"

"I have not said all that. We had performed acts which warranted our arrest. Beyond doubt the police were seeking us. Yet, as you say, I was not afraid of the final result. I chose this means of escape because of you."

"Of me! To protect me, you mean!"

"To save you from the ignominy of arrest."

"And by doing so have placed me in a far more incriminating position; one infinitely harder to explain. You did not think of that, Monsieur. You urged me to come with you; almost forced me to do so. You led me to believe your life was in danger if you remained in Chicago, yet refused to leave without me. You gave me that one choice, of coming with you, or compelling you to remain. In a moment of weakness I yielded; I fled with you. For your sake I have sacrificed my reputation, my good name. And now you tell me coolly, there was no cause, no

occasion. Can I have heard aright, Monsieur?"

She had forgotten where we were, those hundreds of feet of air between us and the water below. Her eyes were dark with indignation; her hands grasped my arm, and her lips trembled. With pressure of my foot I slowed down the motor, and we floated, barely moving, the propeller scarcely audible.

"If I plead guilty," I asked quietly, "will you take into consideration some extenuating circumstances?"

"Are there any? Could anything excuse such an act?" indignantly.

"That will depend upon yourself, Mademoiselle. In my own heart I am justified. There is an adage that all is fair in love and war; then surely the two combined excuse unusual methods. However I am willing to rest my case on the first—love!"

She drew back from me scornfully, but with no lowering of her eyes.

"Love! Are you sure you do not profane the word? Is compromising a girl your idea of love? You think they will not learn the truth back there in Chicago? that my friends will not

hear? But they will; Schmitt will whisper it; that detective will not remain dumb. The gossip of it will creep from lip to lip, accompanied by many a sly smile. You can conceal crime by influence possibly, but all your consuls and ambassadors cannot curb scandal. Once in the air, it spreads. That is what your love has done for me, Monsieur."

I caught the upraised hand, and held it, in spite of her effort to draw away.

"That is enough; now listen to me," in a tone which quieted her. "You have played with me all night, but this is my turn to be heard. I am no boy, not to know my own mind. You insist love is not born in a night, but I doubt if it is ever born in any other way. No! you shall listen to every word I have to say. Mademoiselle, I have loved you ever since we sat in that restaurant alone together. I know not what made me your captive; that is mystery; but I confess the truth. Your doubt does not change the fact. I am a man, and have seen much of life; I have known many women of charm and beauty; I have pretended love, even while my heart scoffed at the possibility. I had reached a stage where I al-

most believed there was no such reality—that the conception of love was a mere dream, a boyish delusion, almost an insanity. Then I met you, looked into your face, listened to your voice, your laughter, gazed into the depths of your eyes—and awoke! I found your presence meant life to me—new life. It did not require a month, or a year, for me to learn this; it was the gift of a moment. From then until now I have had but one thought—you!"

She stared at me, fascinated by my earnestness, with lips parted, and cheeks flushed.

"But I told you—"

"Yes, you told me; you insisted I did not know my own mind; that because I was a Frenchman I possessed no stability. You laughed at me then, and I supposed that laughter represented your own feeling. It checked my audacity, but did not kill my love. I could not tell you all; you would not let me. Almost I thought you did not care. Then I saw your eyes in the glow of the lamp—caught glimpse of them when you were unconscious of their betrayal—and in their depths read my fate. You were not indifferent, not heartless—you cared for me! Don't protest,

Mademoiselle; I know. The night had worked two miracles. I cared no longer for the foil of your lips, for I had had a glimpse at your heart. It was then I resolved you should go with me—not to dishonor, but to peace. I could not wait; I had not the patience; I would bear you away as warriors did of old. I had found my mate, and I took you."

"But I—I am nothing," she urged, the tears in her eyes, "only an American working girl! Monsieur, you cannot mean—"

"Yet I do," I interrupted. "I have met queens, Mademoiselle, and princesses, but no pulse throbbed because of their presence. They were women, but nothing to me. You came to me out of the night; yesterday you did not even exist; yet here in the dawn you are the world. Whatever your name, your station—even though you have none—matters not at all. It is you, Mademoiselle, you I love; you whom I would call wife, and bear away with me across the seas to France. And you will come? Ah, surely, you will come."

"Will I? You are so sure?"

I looked long into her eyes, misty with unshed

tears dewing their lashes, yet frankly meeting mine.

"Yes, I am sure," I said slowly.

Her eyes fell, but her hand remained in mine, warm and throbbing. That was a strange place for love to speak, and I could not reach out my arms to draw her to me; I could only gaze at the flushed, averted face, wondering what she would say. Down below was the curving line of shore, rocky and desolate, the high bluff fringed with trees. With fingers grasping the wheels I swung the monoplane in wide circle to the right, and then permitted it to glide toward the earth with motor stopped, poising the frail craft just above the higher branches in slow flight.

"Do we land here, Monsieur?"

"Beyond, in the open field," I answered, too busy even to glance about. "Look behind, and see if there are any vessels within viewing distance."

She turned partially in her seat, held firm by the strap, and gazed back under the shadow of an uplifted hand. There was an instant of silence; then a startled exclamation.

"It—it is a man! Look, Monsieur!"

CHAPTER XXII

FACE TO FACE IN MID-AIR

IT was a delicate moment for interruption, yet I could not ignore that cry, nor her sudden grasp on my arm. My heart leaped into my throat, yet I retained sufficient presence of mind to turn on the power, and by twist of the wheel sent the monoplane mounting into the sky. An instant we dipped perilously, ere the planes adjusted themselves, and I dare glance about.

"There," she sobbed in excitement. "It is a man! How did he ever get there?"

I could plainly see the form lying outstretched upon the steel wire, the hands gripping the light bamboo framework, the face hidden. The fellow was safe enough unless he deliberately thrust his body through the openings, yet the posture was sufficiently uncomfortable, and it was his weight, no doubt, which had made the monoplane so unmanageable. But how had he got there? Was he dead or alive? I shouted back at him,

my voice carried by the wind, and in response to my second call, he lifted his head, revealing a face blackened by dried blood, but otherwise ghastly in its whiteness. I caught her quick gasp at my shoulder:

"Why! Why! it 's Captain Brandt!"

I recognized him then, a peculiar feeling of revulsion seeming to choke me, as my hands gripped hard on the steering wheel. What was he doing there? How did he ever dare such a mad feat? Was it accident, or design that had made him a passenger? I was in no way surprised at not having discovered his presence before. I had felt the odd drag of the overweighted machine, the sodden slowness with which it responded to the rudder. I realized something must be wrong—that De Vigne had possibly overloaded it—and had glanced back more than once during our earlier flight. Yet in the darkness, and the gray deceptive dawn, I had perceived nothing. Lying as he did, outstretched between the frames, he might easily have passed unnoticed. All these considerations flashed instantly across my mind, yet I possessed just then brief space for thought, as even

his slight movement in the effort to uplift his head, so affected the equipoise of the plane as to send us careening in perilous fashion. Had we been equipped with warping gear instead of the more quickly manipulated ailerons, I doubt if I could have righted the frail craft, but as it was, with a shudder, the great wings settled into stability, and we circled like a huge bird seeking to alight.

"Lie down, you fool!" I roared back over my shoulder. "Don't move again, if you value your life!"

I do not even know if he heard me, but Mademoiselle did, and I caught the thread of her voice calling to him also, and saw the motion of her hands. As for me I was far too busily occupied with levers and wheels to pay heed to anything else. We had already swept past the open field I had chosen for a landing place, yet I was obsessed now with an eagerness to attain solid earth. The very knowledge that the fellow—half mad with fright from the expression of his face—was clinging to the precarious support of that open framework, gave me a feeling of terror. What he might do, or attempt, in his desperation, could

not be guessed at, yet any effort on his part to change his position, to even rise to his knees, might hurl us headlong. The very secret of the plane, its stability in the air, its power of balancing, and swift response to the rudder, depended on the equal distribution of weight, the absence of any conflicting element. During the two hours of flight the man must have remained motionless and inert, perhaps unconscious—but now! Aroused, frightened, possibly insane at sudden discovery of his perilous position, there was no knowing what he might attempt. Our very lives hung in the balance, and the beads of perspiration clung to my forehead, and the blood seemed to stagnate in my veins.

"For God's sake keep him quiet!" I cried out to her, "until I can find a landing place. You hear?"

"Yes."

I knew she answered; knew dimly that she unfastened the strap holding her firm in the seat, and turned her body so as to face him. It was in my mind to protest, to restrap her; I even reached out one hand for the buckle, but a sudden dip of the machine brought it instantly back to

the steering wheel. I glanced down, desperate enough to accept any chance, my eyes surveying the scene below. We were above a country of woods and hills, interspersed by small lakes, connected by narrow streams, scarcely visible. I saw but one town, a mere hamlet, far-away to the right, nestled beside a body of shimmering water. Here and there amid the forest growth appeared small clearings, many of them covered by stumps of trees, but, a mile away, was an open field, an oasis in the wide stretch of forest, green with some vegetable growth. It beckoned me like some mystic hand. I was cool now, determined, my nerves like steel; every instinct alert.

"Hold tight, Mademoiselle; we 're going down!" I warned her, and shut off my motor.

With a great swoop the monoplane glided forward, and then dipped; swung sharply to the left under the influence of some air wave, then righted itself again, and swooped downward toward the advancing earth. With feet braced I held the sharp nose straight, barely grazing the trees of a high ridge, as we swirled level, steering for the open field. At that instant something happened, something which flung the speeding ma-

chine careering sharply to one side. I tugged at the wheel, but there was no time, no distance, left in which to recover. It was all in a second, a swift mad fall. I know we struck the branch of a tree, breaking it; then another, and went crashing down, turning almost completely over as we fell. I know not how it was done, but I jerked the strap from off me, and gripped her in my arms. I heard the crash, a scream—and then we were flung forward, clear of the débris, into the tangled underbrush.

I could not have lost consciousness, for I realized it all; that she was within my arms, resting on me; then that she was alive, and was upon her knees, one arm lifting my head. I heard her voice, but it sounded a long ways off, and I could not answer, or move my body. Someone groaned, and I could see her face, white but unscarred, looking down into mine. I tried to smile at her, but failed. Then she lifted me higher, until my head found rest on her shoulder, and the mist seemed to drift away, and my brain began to comprehend. I endeavored to speak, gulping with dry throat, managing at last to articulate:

"You—you are not hurt?"

"No; only jarred and bruised; you were beneath when we fell," her voice sobbing. "Are you better now? My God, at first I thought you were dead!"

"I must have been stunned, partially at least," finding voice easier. "I seemed paralyzed, but now I can move my limbs. Yes, I can sit up, but am as weak as a kitten. I suppose the machine has gone to smash?"

She nodded, unable to speak, and I sat there breathing heavily, and stared across her shoulder at the wreck. It was complete; nothing remained but a mass of twisted wire and charred bamboo. The engine was blown into fragments, although I had no recollection of hearing the explosion; the blades of the propeller were impaled on the spike of a limb, and the rudder remained but a splinter. Beside it lay the motionless body of Brandt, his head hidden behind a small bush. The sight made me shudder.

"I must try to get up," I said; "we cannot remain here."

"Oh, not yet," and she restrained me with her hands. "There is nothing you can do, and you

are too dizzy to stand—the machine is beyond repair."

"I see that; a complete smash-up. Well, the secret of the motor is safe enough now. Is Brandt killed?"

"I do not know," and she glanced over toward him. "He was groaning, but I could not leave you. Shall I go now?"

"Just a moment first; there is brandy in the inside pocket of this coat, if the flask has not broken. We shall both be better for a sip of it. Can you get it out? My fingers seem useless."

She fumbled at the buttons, and brought forth the flask. It was half full, and I compelled her to take a swallow before drinking myself. The liquor sent a warmth through my veins instantly, and I began to exercise my numbed limbs, assuring myself no bones were broken. High above us was the tree we had struck, two of the upper limbs dangling. I stared up at them, measuring the distance of our fall.

"Fully sixty feet," I said unconsciously aloud. "We might have all been killed."

She shuddered, covering her eyes, after one glance upward.

"I—I think we struck that large branch, where all those smaller limbs are broken," she explained. "That, and this underbrush were what saved us from greater injury. I—I hardly knew what happened."

"The machine swerved, and I lost control; it overbalanced. Did you see what Brandt was doing?"

"He got to his knees, his head thrust through the wires. I cried out to him, but he did not seem to hear. Then we went over, and you caught me. That is all I knew, until I found myself lying here on you. There was an awful sound as the monoplane struck, and a report like a cannon."

"When the motor blew up."

"Yes, a piece hurtled through the air just over us; it is there now in those bushes. I was so frightened, and shocked, I lay there across you, and—and prayed. Then I saw your face, and I knew I must do something or we would all die."

She was trembling like a leaf at the remembrance, her words barely audible. This would never do; action alone would serve to restore her

nerves, bring back her shattered courage. Helping myself by grasp on her shoulder I managed to attain my feet, and stood erect, my head throbbing with a dull ache, swaying at first like a drunken man. But the dizziness passed, and I was able to balance myself, and even essay a few steps, still holding to her arm for partial support. The woods were all about us, but through the underbrush I could perceive not far away the edge of that green field, where I sought to land.

"We will go over and see the fellow," I said slowly, "and then find some way out of here. I think there is a wood road yonder."

We walked the hundred feet in silence, for I found I needed all my strength, although the exercise increased my power noticeably. I approached Brandt, wondering whether the man was dead or alive, and with little feeling of special bitterness toward him. Above all I was curious as to how he got there; how he ever found place on the frame of the monoplane. He remained motionless, and I hauled him forth from the bush, convinced he was beyond our help, only to discover his eyes wide open.

"So you 're not dead, my man!" I began, half

angry at his play acting. "What 's the matter then? Can't you sit up?"

He pressed one hand against his side, and groaned; then, using the other as a support, lifted himself into sitting posture.

"I fell on my head," he responded finally, "and was tangled up in that bush. My side hurts badly."

I looked at it, finding his clothing slashed, and a rather ugly looking wound extending from hip to shoulder. From all appearance the flesh had been gouged by a sharp piece of wood; the wound had bled considerably, and must have been painful; but was scarcely more than skin deep.

"That 's nothing, Brandt," I announced, half inclined to laugh at the pitiful expression on his face. "You are due to live a long while yet. Mademoiselle, would you take my cap, and bring me some water from the stream yonder."

She hurried away in the direction indicated, returning at once to hold back the clothing, while I washed and bandaged the gash. Then I gave him a drink of brandy, and helped him to his feet.

"Now, Monsieur," I said cheerfully, "the cut

will likely hurt some, but you are in no danger. A surgeon over there in the village will make you more comfortable, but I beg you forgo that look of suffering. It is my thought you are a lucky dog."

He looked at me, and then at Mademoiselle, as though he doubted our pretense of geniality.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked at last soberly.

"Do with you!" I echoed. "We shall only be too glad to see the last of you, Monsieur. You overestimate your importance. Back beyond that big oak there is a wood road; you are to go to it, and then turn to the right. It will lead you to a town—unless you care to examine the monoplane further?"

He glanced toward the wreck in uncertainty; then back into my face.

"You mean I am to go without—without trouble?"

"Certainly; you are helpless to injure us in any way." I paused, thinking. "Yet first, Monsieur, I will ask you a question—how came you there on the machine?"

He answered slowly, as though still dazed,

lapsing into German for better expression.

"I cannot tell, not altogether; it was strange, how it happened as it did. I was hit, Monsieur —you know that. I knew nothing, until I woke in the dark, but I could see a little against the sky, where the door was open. They were pushing out the monoplane, and there were the outlines of your forms up above, I could not think at first, only feel. The one conception which gripped me was that you were going away, were escaping. My brain seemed to grasp only the one thought that I must stop you. I was dazed, weak, yet I staggered out of the hangar. I heard the voice of your man shouting orders at the right of the rudder, and I turned the other way, so as not to be seen. The little Irish detective was there, and I pushed him aside. He was afraid of me. By this time the machine was moving fast, but I did not realize the danger; only retained the one thought of stopping you before it was too late. I climbed onto the frame and crawled up. I had no knowledge we had left the ground; it seemed as if I was crazed. Then all at once, I noticed the lights away down below. After that, Monsieur, I hardly know

what happened. It seemed to me I had no mind left. I just lay there gripping the rods, and felt sick. I was on my face looking down, and my brain reeled so I could not lift my head. I heard your voices, and twice I called out, but the wind blew the sound away. I think I fainted from terror, for there was a time when I knew nothing, although I held my grip."

He stopped speaking, his face buried in his hands, unable even then to shake off the horror of his experience. I could not help but feel sympathy, yet had no desire to let him realize the fact.

"You were in no real danger, Brandt," I said quietly, "but I guess you suffered enough. Now you had better go."

He looked at us both questioningly, and turned away. We stood and watched him pick his way through the underbrush until he came to the road. Without glancing back, he turned to the right and disappeared. I walked over, and looked again at the wrecked monoplane, wondering how, by the mercy of God, we had all come out alive from such a crash. Then I came back to where she waited.

"It is our turn now, Mademoiselle," I said, "to take to the road."

"Is the town far away?"

"A mile, perhaps two. I merely caught a glimpse of it just before we fell."

Her long lashes lifted, and her eyes met mine, in their depths the glimmer of a smile.

"We are upon the solid earth now, Monsieur," she said softly.

"Yes—why do you say that?"

The lashes fell, her cheeks crimson.

"When we were up there I—I thought you wished to—to kiss me," her lips faltered, "only you—you did not dare."

And I did.

CHAPTER XXIII

MME. HELEN DESSAUD

THE group about the table in the smoking room of the *Cedric* remained motionless, silent, waiting for the narrator to continue. We were intensely interested, our cigars out, all our eyes upon him. One of the ship's officers stood, just inside the door leaning against the bulkhead. The swinging light revealed expectant faces. It was the little man whose curiosity broke the silence.

"Is that all, Monsieur?" he asked eagerly.

The Lieutenant smiled, glancing about the circle, and touching a flaming match to his cigar.

"I have completed the story, Messieurs," he returned pleasantly. "These were the adventures of a night, but the end I know not. I merely wished you to understand that the Dessaud monoplane was no 'fake.' Have I demonstrated that?"

"You certainly have," answered a strange

voice heartily, "and also the existence of romance even in this prosaic age. Yet you leave us in uncertainty."

The Frenchman's eyes were looking across my shoulder toward the open door, smiling pleasantly. Then he arose to his feet.

"I understand, I think," he said, bowing to us, "and will endeavor to supply the deficiency. Messieurs, my wife—Mme. Helen Dessaud."

She stood there in the open doorway, and the light made her appear a picture in a frame—a dark-haired, bright-eyed woman, gazing at us in surprise.

He stepped forward, and took her hand, and thus they faced us.

"I have been telling them my adventures in America," he said simply. "That is all."

There was an instant of silence; then Hadley spoke:

"The health of Lieutenant and Mme. Dessaud."

We drank it standing.

THE END

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